First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2018

The Last Post - Researching World War I on Film

Today, exactly one hundred years ago, World War I ended. The guns along the Western Front fell silent after four years of fighting - Armistice was declared. The appropriate time now has also come to finish this weblog on the American films and cameramen of the Great War. On behalf of fellow authors Cooper Graham and Jim Castellan, thank you all very much for your interest, comments and enthusiastic support of our film historical research!

For this final weblog here is a reproduction of a post that was published in November 2017 by the International Association for Media and History (IAMHIST) on their website.

Albert Dawson, directing war movies on the Eastern Front, 1915. Colorized picture. Source: National Archives
Link to high res image

"Researching World War I On Film"

BY RON VAN DOPPEREN

The centennial of the First World War has brought about a renewed public interest in this major military conflict. When I first visited Belgium as a history student in the 1980s there were still veterans around who had been in the trenches. They were there to hear the Last Post under the Menin Gate, and I remember vividly how impressed I was by the ceremony and the sight of all these names of the soldiers who had found an anonymous grave in the Ypres Salient.

As the saying goes 'Old soldiers never die, they simply fade away'. It is the same with the films of the Great War. Stored on highly flammable nitrate stock, the film legacy of World War I presents scholars and film fans all over the world with an amazing historical source. The footage to be sure is slowly fading away. Unless preserved on safety stock or digitized we are losing by decomposition an invaluable part of our cultural heritage. I recall the first time I went into the nitrate vaults of the Library of Congress in Culpeper, Virginia, with my esteemed fellow author Cooper Graham, looking for lost film of this war. I was feeling like a kid in a candy store. In one of the cans we found footage mentioning *The German Side of the War*, a movie that had been produced by the Chicago Tribune in 1915. When reeling that film on a viewer we found ourselves in underground bunkers on the Eastern Front, and that's when we discovered the film had been misplaced. We were looking at a completely different film that was shot by Albert K. Dawson, cameraman with the Austro-Hungarian army!

My fascination with these old war films started when as a history student I first read Kevin Brownlow's book *The War, the West and the Wilderness*. Kevin is one of the first historians to research World War I films. He also was fortunate enough to interview some of the cameramen who recorded the Great War, at a time when they were still around. We dedicated our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War* to Kevin Brownlow because as film historians we all stand on his shoulders. These war pictures, as described by Brownlow, were a window on a different world. This was a time when cars and planes were the latest thing, when women could not vote, when it took ten days to cross the Atlantic, when trench warfare devastated a way of life that belonged to the 19th century. Despite the static shots and primitive camera technique these films and newsreels are truly mesmerizing.

The First World War was a modern war that surprised all combatants as well as the people at the home front just because it was so 'modern'. It was also the first modern media war. Film propaganda

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World War I Combat Camera Edwin F. Weigle Found!

Anatomy of an Authentic World War I Combat Scene (1915)

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was not invented by Goebbels but by Wellington House, UFA and the Committee on Public Information in America. Admittedly, wars had been filmed before 1914 but this was the first time in history when the huge publicity potential of this young medium was discovered and exploited.

As I dug deeper into my film research, together with my American colleagues Cooper Graham and Jim Castellan, I also got intrigued by one simple question: how did these guys do it? How did they manage lugging these cumbersome movie cameras with tripod and all to the battlefield? How did they deal with censors, military red tape and the risks of having their movie camera mistaken for the equipment of an artillery spotter? Why did they even run the risk of becoming a prime target? We were on uncharted territory basically, as most of these cameramen – like the soldiers of World War I – had slowly faded away. We interviewed relatives in the U.S. and many of them did not even know that their Granddad had been a cameraman in World War I. But the stories that we found on their photographic work and their life are definitely worth preserving, just like their films. In some rare instances we could even match their personal story with the pictures that they made at the front. It's a strange experience to watch a movie that was made one hundred years ago, as seen through the eyes of the cameraman you get to know so well. As a writer you feel transported back in time. For a brief moment you become the cameraman.

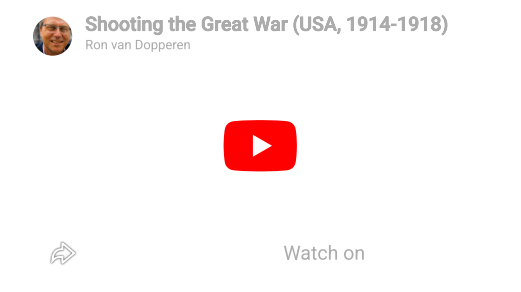
Just like these cameramen who had been pioneers in their trade – the first film correspondents – we had to start most of our film research from scratch. I should give proper credits here to Cooper and Jim for their outstanding work on reconstructing Wilbur H. Durborough's feature film, *On the Firing Line with the Germans*, a unique film report made during the German drive on the Eastern Front in 1915. By using the paper roll collection at the Library of Congress they managed to identify each separate scene from that movie. The next step was finding scenes missing from known Durborough film in TV documentaries and the World War I Signal Corps collection at the National Archives. The last step was piecing them all together in the right order. This is another aspect of this kind of film research: how to piece all of these segments together? World War I film research is a giant jigsaw puzzle because a lot of contemporary footage has been recycled or cut into stock footage. It takes a lot of patience to get the bigger picture.

Sniper attack on the Eastern Front in Russian Poland. Scene from *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (USA, 1915)
Link to high res image

The last years researching World War I film have been a great ride. We have brought back on the screen Durborough's war film which has been wonderfully restored by the Library of Congress. The premiere at the film festival of Pordenone together with Kevin Brownlow as a special guest was just great. This kind of film research never really stops, so after publishing our books and articles we started a weblog *Shooting the Great War* which has the latest updates on World War I cameramen and films that we have found and identified. The blog has over 470.000 views. So, we definitely have an audience out there!

For a download in PDF of all contents in this weblog click this link (112 Mb, 294 pages)

Ron van Dopperen studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Since 2011 he publishes on World War I film, starting with a series of articles for *Film History* journal. He is also co-author together with Cooper C. Graham of *Shooting the Great War: Albert Dawson and the American Correspondent Film Company* (2013) and together with Jim Castellan and Cooper Graham of *American Cinematographers in the Great War* (2014) which was sponsored by the Pordenone Silent Film Festival.



Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 11:00 AM 5 comments:

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2018

Shooting the Breakthrough - A.E.F. Cameraman Wounded (France, 1918)

Having taken the Hindenburg Line two American Divisions as part of the British Fourth Army participated in the final stage of World War I. Against heavy German resistance the American soldiers charged across open country and crossed the river Selle on October 17, 1918. While filming the breakthrough Sergeant Granville Howe, motion picture cameraman attached to the 30th Division (American Expeditionary Force), was wounded.

View of a German shell exploding in the distance at Molain, near Vaux-Andigny, France, on October 17, 1918. Shrapnel from the shell killed two British Tommies, five horses, and wounded the moving-picture operator of the 30th Division. Colorized Signal Corps photograph, taken by Lt. Edward N. Jackson. NARA, record number J 33371, courtesy Harry B. Kidd.

Link to original high res image

According to a report by the Chief Signal Officer from 1919, seven American cameramen were wounded during the First World War while taking pictures at the front. Details of what happened to these official military photographers are very hard to find. Also, pictures showing the actual moment they were hit by enemy fire are extremely rare. As a result, we were amazed to find a photograph recently in the collection of the National Archives, showing such a moment. A group of American soldiers can be seen taking cover while a shell explodes nearby. The caption mentions an American movie cameraman who was wounded, as well as some British soldiers. Note the railroad track in the right corner on the foreground. This detail among other things later made it possible to substantiate the report on what happened on October 17, 1918.

Identification of Photographer

The caption has a fixed date and location, but we initially had no clue about the identity of the photographer who took this picture, as well as the cameraman who got wounded. Until Harry Kidd helped us out, and supplied us with a copy of the original print that was cleared by the A.E.F. censors shortly after the Armistice. As it turns out, the picture was taken by Lt. Edward N. Jackson, photographic officer with the 27th Division. Jackson featured before in an earlier weblog, and we also mentioned him briefly in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*. He was a press photographer from New York and had a major scoop with his pictures of the Peace Treaty at Versailles in 1919.

Tanks of the American 301st Tank Battalion going into action at St. Souplet on the morning of October 17, 1918. Note Old Glory flying from the tank. Signal Corps picture, probably taken by Lt. Jackson's photo-unit, from the collection of the Imperial War Museum

Harry's invaluable input gave us the lead we were hoping for. Jackson wrote a personal account on his experiences during the First World War. As quoted by Joseph J. Caro in his book *On Assignment: The Great War*, Jackson reported how he and his fellow cameramen were attached to the 30th Division in September 1918. This made perfect sense, as both American units - the 27th and the 30th Divison - were under British command and collaborated closely during the final attack on the German lines.

Casualty Report by Lt. Jackson

Here are fragments from Jackson's account on this incident during the American drive which would go down into history books as the Battle of the Selle:

> *"Now the soldiers were out of the trenches, fighting in the open. The enemy was in slow retreat. It was nuts for us! We were in a picture man's paradise! Something worthwhile photographically, was happening every minute! .... This was all like a photographer's dream - and a soldier's nightmare. Picture on picture of roaring, thundering action flashed all around us. You couldn't shoot it all; you could hardly should any, especially when you are being shot at yourself. We were warned not to show ourselves in the open fields too much because we would draw fire from the enemy."*
>
> *"... By this time St. Souplet was being pounded to complete ruins. Buildings were on fire, and clouds of smoke and flames shot up over the little town. Many tanks were coming up now. The one with the American flag was far in advance, plowing steadily on. What a sight to see! "Gosh, that was a whopper!", Bennett [Jackson's camera assistant] shouted, as shells continued to fall all around us. Artillery horses near our guns started to stampede and men sought refuge near the railroad tracks.*
>
> *I turned to see what luck Howe was having with his movie machine and saw him step away from the tripod mounted camera. His mouth was stretched wide, his teeth flashing. For a brief second I thought he was grinning at something. Then I saw his face was distorted in pain! Bennett and I caught him as he fell and we carried him over the railroad tracks to a safe field. A hasty examination revealed that he had shrapnel wounds in both legs. He was bleeding badly. Calling for help, some English soldiers came and carried Howe to a first aid station on the other side of town. I never saw him again but heard he was sent home to Chicago soon after."*

British artillery in action at Molain, October 17, 1918. Signal Corps picture which was probably taken by Lt. Jackson's photo unit
Link to low res image

The Cameraman: Granville J. Howe

Jackson was right about Howe's return to Chicago, but it wasn't until January 22, 1919, when he departed from France. It evidently took some time before his wounds were healed well enough, so he could be shipped back to the United States. The information on Howe's life and work remains somewhat sketchy. Born in Tiffin, Ohio, in 1876, Howe started working as a photographer in the Chicago area. When America entered World War I he joined the U.S. Signal Corps and he was assigned to the American Expeditionary Force. He sailed from Hoboken, New Jersey, on the military transport ship SS *Covington* on June 15, 1918. Shortly after his arrival in France Howe must have been assigned to the 27th Division, and his camera covered most of the major campaigns by the 27th and the 30th Division. In the collection of the National Archives we found a contemporary report mentioning Howe's extraordinary work as a motion picture cameraman. He was cited for bravery in having taken pictures under heavy shell and machine gun fire during all of the operations that he witnessed at the Western Front.

After the First World War Howe worked as chief cameraman for Otto A. Brinner in Chicago. The Brinner Film Company specialized in topical movies and newsreel productions.

Granville Howe died in Chicago on July 8, 1945.

Our report on Granville Howe has been published in this biography by www.imdb.com

With special thanks to Harry Kidd for his research and input on this weblog

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:22 AM 2 comments:

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2018

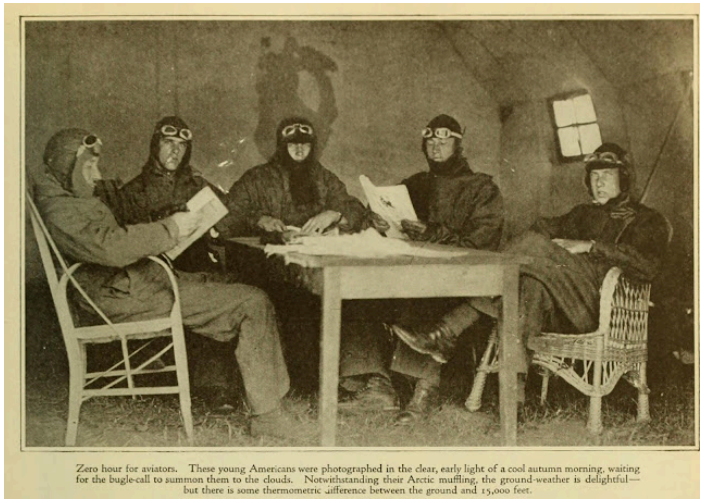
"Under Four Flags" (USA, 1918)

Released nationwide by the World Film Corporation in January 1919, *Under Four Flags* was the last official World War I feature film produced by the Committee on Public Information (CPI), America's wartime propaganda agency. Segments of this historic film from the collection of the Library of Congress are now available online.

Film poster *Under Four Flags* (USA, 1918)
Link to high res image

"The Victory of Democracy"

With 1,820 bookings in American theaters, grossing almost $ 64,000,- *Under Four Flags* did not live up to the expectations of the CPI Film Division. The movie premiered in New York City at the prestigious Rialto and Rivoli theaters in November 1918, shortly after the Armistice was signed. The end of World War I was included into the movie with a caption announcing "The Victory of Democracy". President Woodrow Wilson next was shown on screen, as are victory parades in Washington, D.C. The film concluded: "And now the cannon's roar has ceased and peaceful days and peaceful nights have come again to those across the seas."



Scene from *Under Four Flags*, reproduced in an article published in *Photoplay Magazine*, January 1919

Public interest in the Great War quickly disappeared in the United States after the signing of the Armistice, which is - apart from the impact of the flu epidemic - the main reason why *Under Four Flags* did not prove to be a box office hit. As described by Benjamin B. Hampton in his book *The History of the American Film Industry*: "On November 11th war pictures were saleable merchandise; on the night of November 11th they became unmarketable. During the dull months of 1918, while the studios were marking time, the principal item of production had been war pictures. On Armistice Day, distributors and producers had almost nothing else in their warerooms; they faced the loss of millions of dollars in property now worthless through this sudden twist in the taste of their customers."

The original film version of *Under Four Flags* had seven reels, with footage showing the American offensives at Château-Thierry and St. Mihiel. As a contribution to the Allied war effort, the fifth reel had scenes showing the Italian army fighting against the Austrians in the Alps. Most of the original footage in this CPI movie was shot by military cameramen of the U.S. Signal Corps in France. The footage from the Library of Congress runs for about 25 minutes. Although it is not a complete print and despite the uneven pictorial quality the original intertitles which were

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written by Kenneth C. Beaton are still in place and give a good impression of this remarkable World War I propaganda film.

Although now considered "silent", this World War I film originally had a musical score which tied in with the Christmas season of 1918 and was composed by Hector Richard.

Here is a download link to the film music of *Under Four Flags*, also available at the Library of Congress.

"Under Four Flags" (USA, 1918)
Ron van Dopperen

Watch on

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:04 AM 1 comment:

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2018

Faking War Footage

World War I film scenes sometimes were staged before the camera. The reasons for faking the footage were complex and have been described in more detail in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*.

THE TROUBLES OF A FAKER
"Hey, you with the cigarette! You're supposed to be dead."

Picture from the article in *Illustrated World* on fake war films, March 1916

Some fake war films, like the movie that was shot by Arthur Dugmore on the Belgian defense of the city of Alost in September 1914, proved to be a huge success in the American movie theaters. This earlier weblog has more information on how war scenes were staged, with as an example the following film scene of a German infantry attack that was shot by American cameraman, Albert K. Dawson, on the Western Front around February 1915.

German soldiers going over the top at the Western Front, filmed by Albert K. Dawson. Footage located in the BBC *Great War* series, Episode 5 (1964)

Although film was a relatively new medium during World War I the movie-going audience in the United States knew

that not all of these supposed 'war scenes' were for real. The film trade papers in America frequently ran articles warning exhibitors about the risks of showing fake and unreliable war films. The audience also read stories that explained how these fake war films were produced.

How to Recognize a Fake War Film

A typical example is an article that was published in March 1916 in the popular magazine *Illustrated World*. Author Edward C. Crossman describes a number of staged war films that were shown in the American movie theaters at the beginning of World War I, and explains how these scenes were made. He also goes into quite some detail on how the audience could recognize a fake scene from a real war scene, giving attention to the position of the film camera and technical details about the weapons that were used in the film.

Although the writer of this article does not mention any names of producing companies the lines on a Belgian war film that was shown uinder the auspices of a big American newspaper may refer to the *Chicago Tribune*'s film *On Belgian Battlefields* (USA, 1914) which was taken by the Tribune's staff photographer Edwin F. Weigle and is now considered 'lost', apart from a short scene that we could identify recently.

Here is a download link to this article from *Illustrated World*.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:17 AM 3 comments:

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2018

Sending Smiles to the Soldiers by the Movies (USA, 1918)

Around October 20, 1918 an estimated 14,000 people gathered in Grant Park, Chicago, for a huge movie project. Friends, relatives and sweethearts of soldiers from the Illinois regiments that were serving in France all gathered to appear before the camera, so the soldiers could see their loved ones on Christmas Eve.

Scene from the "Smile Films": friends and family say hello to Eddie Brand from Chicago. Colorized picture

The project was called "Smiles Films" and judging from contemporary reports it was a terrific morale booster. The idea actually was quite original. Usually films were made in Europe for the American home front, but this time it was the other way around. According to film trade reports, the *Chicago Examiner* - a Hearst newspaper - came up with this idea and joined forces with the Rothacker Film Company for the making of these special films. As production went underway the scope of the project expanded rapidly. At first the makers of "Smile Films" thought about shooting scenes of friends and relatives of soldiers from the 131rd and 132nd Illinois regiments. Then the Black Hawk Division was added to their list, as well as the 149th Field Artillery, the Marines from Illinois and the Afro-American soldiers. In the end director Rex Weber and his crew produced 34 reels of film, totalling 26,683 feet of film.

"Turning Chicago Upside Down"

When the "Smiles Films" were recorded war on the Western Front was still being fought by the American soldiers and no one could have guessed that the war would be over by Christmas. Sending a personal message over there by using movies was something the boys in the trenches would certainly appreciate. During post-production the footage was edited into segments according to the specific name of the military unit, so the film could be shown to the appropriate soldiers through the YMCA. Each film had an introduction by Governor Lowden and Judge Landis who was quoted on an intertitle urging the boys to "give the Germans both barrels". Director Rex Weber, who had made a series of films in 1917 for the American Military Relief Association, also appeared in these movies, announcing what would happen to Chicago when the soldiers returned home. A scene was projected next, showing the streets of Chicago that were turned upside down by tilting the movie camera.

According to film producer Watterson R. Rothacker, director Rex Weber was thoroughly exhausted by this massive film project. In retrospect that turned out to be an ominous statement. On December 9, 1918, shortly before his movies were shown to the American soldiers in France, Weber died - one of the millions of victims of the Spanish flu that was sweeping across Europe and the U.S. at the time.

Unfortunately, we haven't been able so far to find the footage of these "Smiles Films" in the historical film archives, but in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. we came across a fascinating selection of pictures showing the making of these films in Grant Park, Chicago.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:14 AM 1 comment:

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2018

Official War Photographer William Fox (Western Front, 1918)

Although they shot thousands of feet of footage you hardly see them on film: the official cameramen of World War I. By a stroke of luck we recently found a rare movie scene that features one of these war photographers: William Fox, commanding the Photo-Unit attached to the 5th Division of the American Expeditionary Force.

Official Photographer

William Fox was mentioned in an earlier weblog. He was a press photographer who worked for Underwood & Underwood in New York City. In 1916 Fox was attached to General Pershing's forces as the only official accredited cameraman to cover the Punitive Expedition into Mexico. The National Archives and the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. have a collection of pictures taken by Fox in Mexico at that time. Here is a selection of these photographs which were uploaded on our photo channel.

William Fox in Mexico, 1916
Link to low res original photograph

Thanks to Harry Kidd's excellent photographic research on the U.S. Signal Corps World War I cameramen we could trace some additional background information on Lieutenant Fox's work after the American entry into the First World War. First, we found two pictures taken by Fox in June 1918 at Newport News, Virginia, when he was covering troop transports to France. Here is a link to one of his photographs, from Harry Kidd's photo channel on Flickr.

Next, as a postscript to this weblog, in 2023 we discovered two pictures in the World War I Signal Corps collection of the National Archives, showing Fox together with Captain Albert K. Dawson, a well known war photographer who had been among the first photographic officers to join the Signal Corps after the American entry into the war. These shots were taken on November 14, 1917, at Camp Leach in Washington, D.C. and show soldiers of the 24th Engineers Battalion on camouflage training. Fox at the time was commissioned into the Signal Corps with the rank of 1st Lieutenant.

Lt. William Fox with Graflex camera at Camp Leach, 14 November 1917
Link to full photo series

"The Red Devils"

The WW1 Signal Corps collection has a picture taken by Fox on July 31, 1918, showing the loading of a beef ship in Hoboken, N.J. There is also this photograph recorded by Fox on August 2, 1918, showing a safe arrival card of an American soldier, which indicates Fox had sailed for France by then. He was assigned to the 5th Division, A.E.F, as photographic officer. Nicknamed "The Red Devils", the 5th Division was activated on December 11, 1917, just over eight months after the American entry into World War I, at Camp Logan, near Houston, Texas and began training for deployment to the Western Front. The entire division had arrived in France by May 1, 1918, and the units were soon deployed into the front line. Battle honors to the Fifth Division were earned for its participation at the St. Mihiel Drive and Meuse-Argonne Offensive.

In October 1918, Lieutenant Fox and his photographic unit reached the Meuse river while the 5th Division was driving the German army out of the Argonne area. Their picture was taken on October 19, 1918, near Montfaucon.

Signal Corps photographic unit attached to the 5th Division, 1st Army. Personnel, left to right: Sgt 1cl A. J. Mann; Cpl J. G. Jones, S.C. Motion Picture Photographer; 1st Lt. Wm Fox, S.C. Still Photographer: Cpl. Paul Bogart, Ass't; and Master Signal Electrician Gare Schwartz. Fayel Farm near Montfaucon, Meuse, France. Photographer: Lieutenant Wm. Fox, S.C. Location: Montfaucon, Meuse, France. Date October 19, 1918. Colorized photograph, courtesy Harry B. Kidd

Link to high res image

Harry Kidd's research at the National Archives has produced additional references to Fox and his camera crew. On October 22, 1918, he was filmed having lunch with members of his photographic team, as well as with officers of the 5th Division at mess. Here is a download link to the 'dope sheet' movie cards, describing these two scenes. Part of this footage we also found in the collection of the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

Footage Found at the Imperial War Museum

On October 25, 1918, three days later, Fox again was filmed inside the city of Cunel, when he was setting up his movie camera in front of a church that supposedly had been used by the Germans as a cinema. When Fox was filming Cunel had just been evacuated by the retreating Germans, but it seems the place was still dangerous because Fox appears to be running away from shell fire in the film scene that we found in the collection of the Imperial War Museum.

With special thanks to Harry Kidd for his research and input on this weblog

Official War Photographer William Fox (1918)
Ron van Dopperen

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Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:22 AM 3 comments:

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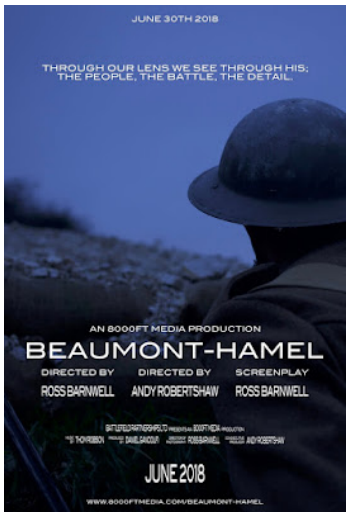
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2018

World War I Through the Lens of the Cameraman (GB, 2018)

Crowd funded by World War I and film history fans alike, *Beaumont-Hamel* was released online on June 30, 2018. The film has a unique approach to the Great War. The Battle of the Somme is seen here through the lens of the official cinematographer, Geoffrey Malins, who on July 1, 1916, covered the bloodiest battle in British military history.



Co-directed by a film maker (Ross Barnwell) and a World War I historian (Andy Robertshaw, co-author of *Ghosts on the Somme*), this short film places historical accuracy at the centrepiece of the drama. Highly recommended!

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:34 AM 1 comment:

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2018

Capturing the Great War from Above (France, 1918)

In the collection of the Imperial War Museum the authors recently found a remarkable film by photographic officer Captain Edwin H. Cooper, showing his preparations for a staged battle between the American ace Eddie Rickenbacker and a captured German plane. During the making of this movie Cooper's plane crashed but he survived miraculously.

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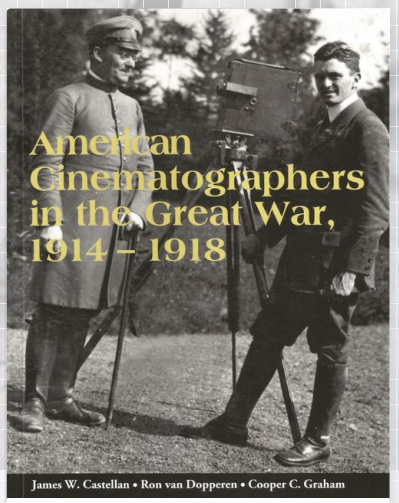

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Filming General John J. Pershing (USA, 1919)
World War I Home Movies (USA, 1928)

Lieutenant Edwin H. Cooper, getting ready for a motion picture flight. Aviation School, Issoudon, 12 December 1917. Colorized Signal Corps picture, courtesy Harry B. Kidd
Link to original high res image

Distinguished Service Cross for Extraordinary Bravery

Edwin H. Cooper (1881-1948) featured before in this weblog. He was the photographic officer with the 26th "Yankee" Division and in 1917 Cooper was one of the first official cameramen to land in France with the American Expeditionary Force. In a previous weblog we described how Cooper risked his life while filming the American attack on Château-Thierry. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his extraordinary bravery during this offensive. Cooper also appears in a recent documentary that we produced - *Mobilizing Movies!* - on the U.S. Signal Corps cameramen of the First World War.

In his memoirs Cooper explained how he got interested in aerial photography. When he landed at St. Nazaire in October 1917 one of the first things he noticed was a huge observation balloon above the harbor. He immediately decided he wanted to experience the thrill of covering the war from above: "We passed over a very beautiful little chateau which reminded me of a toy house in a well kept Christmas yard. The coast of Brittany is very rocky, jutting out into the water, which was a most wonderful blue. This was the most beautiful ride I ever had. On reaching St. Nazaire we circled over the town, the pilot maneuvering so we could approach the pile of automobiles by making a long glide and at the proper time for me to crank the motion picture camera. I made a mistake by putting my hand up broadside to grasp the crank. The wind pressure was so great that it snapped my hand back, hitting me in the face, and I had to offer my hand knife-wise against the wind, and even at that the cranking was very difficult."

Capturing the American Aces

In December 1917 Cooper went to Issoudon, the training camp for American aviators. There he met most of the American aces, such as Eddie Rickenbacker, Jimmy Meissner and President Roosevelt's son, Quentin. Many of these men he would encounter again at the 94th Aero-Squadron near Toul. Cooper pictured the training period for the aviators, starting with the roulier class. This was a plane with the propellers clipped to keep the machine from rising from the ground. From there he followed the training of the aviators from one field to another and finally to the acrobatic field. Each day he was in the air and by then he had decided he wanted to join the Air Service.

Major Raoul Lufbery at the 94th Aero-Squadron, photographed by Lt. Edwin Cooper on April 18, 1918. Colorized Signal Corps photograph courtesy Harry B. Kidd
Link to original high res image

Cooper also photographed Lafayette Escadrille ace, Major Raoul Lufbery, shortly before his death:

> *"I shall always remember the luncheon I had with Major Lufbery on the Friday before he was killed. He never talked aviation or his exploits, but that day he mentioned the fact, referring to a boy that had gone down in flames, that if he was ever in flames he would jump. That afternoon I photographed him in front of his plane. The following Sunday afternoon they received word at the field that there was a Boche plane coming toward Toul. The flight on duty started up and they had hardly reached a good height when the Boche plane was seen over Toul.*
>
> *It fell down out of control and everyone thought it had been hit by the artillery. It narrowly escaped hitting a building, but righted and started to zoom up. A lieutenant told me, who was standing on the balcony of the Comedie Hotel in Toul, that it was so low he could have hit it with an orange. The flight did not see the Boche, but Lufbery went up after him alone. He was on the German's trail chasing him hard toward Germany, when presently a puff of smoke was seen in Lufbery's plane. The plane stalled. He climbed out and jumped, evidently trying to reach the river running under it, but instead landed on a picket fence near the home of a French peasant. When Major Huffer went after his body the French people had moved it to the mairie and completely covered it with wild flowers. They brought down the German just as he reached the lines and found there had been a gunner lying down in the fusilage who had fired the bullet. Several days later, I made*

Captured on Film by U.S. Cameramen - The Romanov M...
The World War I Past of Academy Award Winner Alexa...
Sailing for France - Cameraman Victor Fleming
► August (2)
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► April (4)
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the picture of Lufbery' s funeral."

Fearless Aerial Photographer

Lieutenant Cooper was by all accounts a fearless aerial photographer. Because of his audacity he was admitted as a charter member of the Gimper Club at 94th Aero-Squadron. To join this exclusive club one had to do a stunt or be a true ace. There is a picture of these club members, taken in the summer of 1918, including Lt. Cooper together with his friend Eddie Rickenbacker. Judging from a report in the trade press, Cooper must have qualified for the Gimper Club not because he had shot down German planes but as a result of his remarkable stunts: "To get a proper focus, he would climb out of his seat in an airplane, slid out to the tail of the machine, and there complete his work. His weight had caused the tail to dip, and the pilot had to loop the loop several times to save their lives", the *Bulletin of Photography* reported in October 1918.

Picture from Eddie Rickenbacker to his friend Captain Cooper
Link to low res image

Lost footage found at Critical Past and the Imperial War Museum

The opening movie scenes that we found are from the Imperial War Museum and were taken on October 18, 1918 when Cooper had just been promoted to Captain. You see him fitting his Debrie motion picture camera to a gun position inside the cockpit of a Liberty plane. Cooper went up in a two-seater together with Jimmy Meissner that day. Rickenbacker in his book *Fighting the Flying Circus* (1919) described how their plane crashed a couple of miles outside of the aerodrome. "We hurried over, expecting to find the occupants badly injured, as the Liberty appeared to be a total wreck. But out stepped Jimmy and Captain Cooper, neither of them the worse for their experience. And to complete our surprise, the camera, although covered with the débris of the machine, was quite unhurt!"

The wrecked Liberty plane, showing Cooper's movie camera atached to the observer's seat. Photographer: Sgt. Gideon Eikleberry, Signal Corps cameraman, 26th Division, A.E.F. Location: Rembercourt, Meurthe et Moselle, France. Date: October 18, 1918. Colorized photograph, courtesy Harry B. Kidd
Link to high res image

Undaunted by the crash Cooper three days later again cranked his movie camera while filming a staged battle between Rickenbacker inside a Spad and a captured German plane. This time his flight had a safe landing. Cooper's film of this duel in the sky has been found in the stock collection of Critical Past. The original footage must have looked quite spectacular. In order to make the dogfight look realistic the planes shot special tracer bullets. At the end of the film when the German plane went down landing flares that had been fitted under the wings were set on fire. According to Rickenbacker, the German plane even had a dummy pilot installed that was thrown out of the aircraft as the plane dived down. Rickenbacker mentioned the fighting looked so real a French artillery unit opened fire, mistaking the German plane for a real enemy aircraft. Cooper's historic footage also has a close-up of pilot Jimmy Meissner in the front seat of his plane.

We have edited these scenes from the Imperial War Museum and Critical Past on our YouTube channel. Enjoy!

Taking Aerial Motion Pictures in World War

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:52 AM No comments:

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2018

Filming General John J. Pershing (USA, 1919)

On September 9, 1919, a group of Signal Corps cameramen was assigned to take pictures of General John J. Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Force in World War I. While posing for this film and photo opportunity Pershing showed his typical sense of humor.

General Pershing poses for U.S. Signal Corps cameramen. New York City, September 9, 1919. Signal Corps Collection, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Record number 111-SC-62677. Colorized picture
Link to original high res image

Victory Parade down Fifth Avenue

There was a reason why Pershing had to deal with all these cameramen. The next day he was going to lead a victory parade down New York City's Fifth Avenue. Vast crowds would cheer as 25,000 U.S. soldiers who had served in the A.E.F.'s 1st Division marched from 107th Street to Washington Square, wearing trench helmets and their full combat gear.

To prepare for this publicity drive it was decided that the U.S. Army needed to have a new set of still pictures and film close up shots of America's war hero who had recently been promoted to *General of the Armies of the United States*, the highest rank possible for any member of the U.S. armed forces. For this special film and photo opportunity Pershing agreed to pose on top of the roof of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. For photographers General Pershing may have been a perfect model because of his striking looks and impressive appearance. But people who knew him better were aware of the fact that he never felt quite comfortable in front of a camera. The General evidently wanted to finish the shoot as soon as possible. As Sergeant R.E. Warner took this picture above Pershing said to Lieutenant Sutton, who was grinding his movie camera:

"Do they let you waste all that film on me, Lieutenant?"

This Signal Corps film from the National Archives has scenes showing Pershing leading the 1st "Big Red One" Division down Fifth Avenue the following day on September 10, 1919.

Additional scenes showing the Victory Parade in New York City have been found by co-author Cooper C. Graham at the Library of Congress. Here are his notes on these scenes, which were used for his presentation *World War I*

in Motion in June 2017.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:01 AM No comments:

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2018

World War I Home Movies (USA, 1928)

In the film collection at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. the authors recently found one of the earliest American home movies on World War I. Partly based on original footage shot by military cameramen of the U.S. Signal Corps this film series belonged to the War Department but was released on 16 mm. format in 1928 by the Empire Safety Film Co., Inc., located on Seventh Avenue in New York City, for the series "12 Film Monuments."

Advertisement for the Empire Safety Film World War I series (1928)

Link to low res image

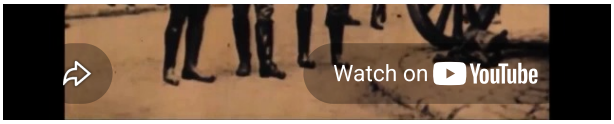
Series of Shorts

The title of this film series refers to twelve important events during World War I for the United States. Each episode was put on a 100 feet reel and was printed on safety stock. The customer could buy a separate reel for $4,50,- The list of this World War I series of shorts is as follows: "Cantigny", "St. Mihiel", "Leviathan", "Argonne Forest", "Château-Thierry", "Zeppelin's Last Raid Over London", "Exploits of German Submarines" (four episodes), "Landing at Brest" and "Russia in the World War."

The footage that we found at the National Archives contains part of the original series: "Château-Thierry", "Exploits of German Submarines" (some but not all episodes) and ""Zeppelin's Last Raid." The quality of these pictures is extraordinary and the footage is beautifully tinted.

We uploaded the episodes on Château-Thierry - the A.E.F's first major engagement at the Western Front - and the Zeppelin attack on London on our YouTube channel.

In this previous weblog we also posted on American World War I home movies.



Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:37 AM 2 comments:

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2018

Captured on Film by U.S. Cameramen - The Romanov Murder Scene (1918)

In December 1918, a photographic team of the U.S. Signal Corps led by Captain Howard Kingsmore arrived in Yekaterinburg, Russia, where they filmed inside the house where Tsar Nicholas II and his family was brutally murdered. Against all odds, we recently found Kingsmore's personal story on this photographic assignment, as well as part of these historic films.

Captain Kingsmore (second from right) and his photographic team, Vladivostok, January 1919. Behind the movie camera is Pvt. Philip Tannura. Right: Badge of the Signal Corps Photo Unit American Expeditionary Force Siberia, from the personal collection of still photographer Sgt. John G. Hemmer
Link to original trade paper article

The execution of the last Russian Tsar and his family hardly needs an introduction. After the Bolsheviks had taken over power the Romanov family was moved to a so-called 'House of Special Purpose' in Yekaterinburg. The Imperial family was kept in strict isolation within the walls of a sinister heavily guarded building that was surrounded by a palisade. The Bolsheviks initially wanted to put the Tsar on trial, but in the summer of 1918 anti-Communist forces were at the gates of Yekaterinburg, and the Reds feared their captives would fall into enemy hands. As a result, death to the Romanovs was declared. Tsar Nicholas II, his wife Tsarina Alexandra and their five children Olga, Tatiana, Maria, Anastasia, and Alexei were shot, bayoneted and clubbed to death on the night of 16-17 July 1918. Their bodies were disposed of in a most gruesome manner.

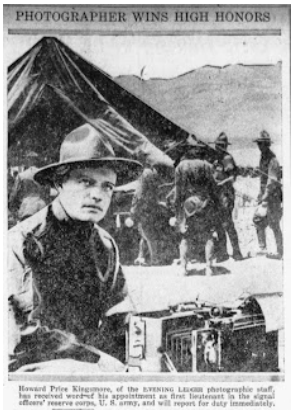
The Cameramen

Howard P. Kingsmore was the photographic officer of a U.S. Signal Corps camera team that recorded the operations of the American Expeditionary Army in Siberia. Born in 1886, Kingsmore started his photographic work for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, covering the burial of President McKinley, the coal strikes of 1901-1902 and the 50th anniversary of the Civil War battle of Gettysburg. Around 1907 Kingsmore became chief photographer for the *Philadelphia Evening Ledger.* For this newspaper he covered the civil war in Mexico, as well as the Punitive Expedition by General Pershing into that country in 1916. When the United States entered World War I he applied for a commission in the U.S. Signal Corps as a photographic officer. He was commissioned as a Lieutenant in September 1917, appears to have made mostly training pictures while he was in America and in Augustus 1918 was promoted to Captain, when a photographic section was set up for the Siberian Expedition. After the First World War Kingsmore became a cameraman for *Fox News*.

Cpt. Howard P. Kingsmore (second from left) among some well-known American World War I cameramen. To his right is Major Bert Underwood, formerly of the photographic company of Underwood & Underwood. Second from the right is 1st Lt. Edward N. Jackson, photographic officer of the 27th Division, who filmed at the Peace Treaty Conference in Versailles. On the right of this picture we have Wilbur H. Durborough, who made movies with the German army in 1915. Signal Corps colorized photograph from the collection of the National Archives. Courtesy Harry B. Kidd

Link to high res image

Interview with Kevin Brownlow



Howard P. Kingsmore, 1917
Link to high res image

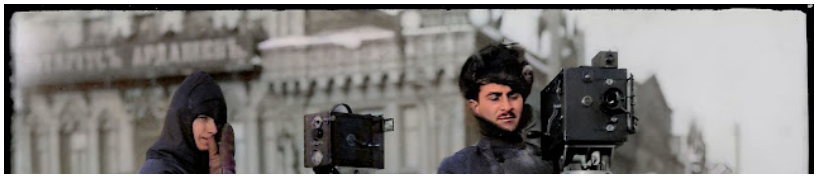
Judging from the production file of the films that were made by Kingsmore and his camera team, they filmed across Siberia between November 1918 and February 1919, covering various operations by the Expeditionary Force that was trying to push the Red Army out of Russia. We have described this Signal Corps footage from Russia in more detail in a previous weblog. Five men were selected for this photographic team, including two movie camera operators. One of Kingsmore's men, Philip Tannura, was interviewed by Kevin Brownlow for his book *The War, the West and the Wilderness*. Tannura was among Kingsmore's cinematographers and in the interview with Brownlow Tannura mentioned how he accompanied Kingsmore while they visited the place where the Tsar and his family were executed. "We couldn't find out whether they had actually been killed or not", Tannura said. "We photographed all the rooms." Judging from a photograph that we found recently on the website of Radio Free Europe, Donald C. Thompson was also part of this photographic team in Yekaterinburg at that time.

Kingsmore said he boarded a Red Cross freight train in Vladivostok in November 1918. The trip across Siberia took about nine weeks. The accommodation on the train was of a most primitive nature. The American cameramen traveled in box cars that were originally built for cattle. Arriving in Yekaterinburg, the cameramen found the city controlled by Czech forces. These had taken Yekaterinburg shortly after the Tsar and his family were murdered. Kingsmore was told the Romanovs were subjected to many indignities by the Communist soldiers who guarded them. It should be noted here that at the moment when Kingsmore and Tannura arrived in Yekaterinburg an official investigation was still being carried out on the mysterious disappearance of the Imperial family. As far as the Kremlin was concerned, they had simply vanished into thin air and the Communists denied any allegation they had killed the Romanovs.

Signal Corps cameraman John G. Hemmer in a sidecar with local driver, Siberia, 1919. After the war Hemmer became a staff photographer for the *New York News*

Photographic Evidence of the Romanov Execution

Kingsmore's and Tannura's pictures indicate this was a fabricated lie. One of their still photographs shows the cellar where the Romanovs were executed. Bullets were dug out of the wall by the Bolsheviks to destroy evidence of the crime, but the holes still remained and were clearly visible. Their pictures also demonstrate how the Tsar's children had to sleep on the floor, as well as the search by the investigating commitee for further proofs of the execution. Kingsmore also appears to have talked with eye witnesses. One told him the Romanovs were on their knees begging for mercy while they were executed in the basement of the house.



Donald C. Thompson (left) and Philip Tannura, taking moving pictures in Yekaterinburg, 1919. Colorized picture. Source: website Radio Free Europe

Czech headquarters at Yekaterinburg, December 1918. Signal Corps picture probably taken by Kingsmore or Tannura

Part of the footage that was shot at Yekaterinburg has been retrieved and identified by the authors in the film collection of the National Archives in Washington, D.C. (record number 111-H-1161). These scenes were probably taken by Tannura and show an exterior of the Czech military headquarters, the house the Romanovs lived in, as well as shots of the Czarina's room and the room that was occupied by the Tsar's daughters. We edited these historic scenes into a short clip that has been posted on our YouTube channel.

Here is also a download link to a contemporary newspaper story from the Grand Forks Herald (June 1919) on Kingsmore's experiences in Siberia.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:16 AM 4 comments:

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2018

The World War I Past of Academy Award Winner Alexander Edouart

A winner of ten Academy Awards and for many years a recognized innovator in special movie effects, Alexander F. Edouart worked on approximately 350 films, including Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, the last one being *Rosemary's Baby*. His photographic work with the U.S. Signal Corps during the First World War merits our special attention.

2nd Lt. Maurice F. Graham, 50th Aero Squadron, and Pvt. Alexander F. Edouart (left), Photo Unit, 78th Division. Photographer: Pvt. A.A. Furst, U.S. Signal Corps. Location: Menans farm near Chatel-Chéhéry, Ardennes, France. Date: October 14, 1918. NARA Ref. #: 111-SC-27131. Colorized picture, courtesy Harry B. Kidd
Link to original high res image

Top Hollywood Special Effects Technician

Edouart was for many decades one of Hollywood's top special effects technicians. Though of French descent, he was born in Northern California in 1894, the son of a portrait photographer. He joined the film industry early on, working for a subsidiary of Paramount, Realart, as an assistant cameraman from about 1915. At Paramount in the 1920s, Edouart developed a rear-projection technique which became the crowning achievement of his career. To improve this technique, Edouart developed a triple-head process projector, which improved and sharpened the background image. Remaining as head of Paramount's special effects department until his retirement in the late '60s, Edouart won Academy Awards for *I Wanted Wings* (1941) and *Reap the Wild Wind* (1942), the latter film lensed in Technicolor.

General view of Grand Pre from a distance showing some of the most hotly contested battlefields. Pvt. Alex. F. Edouart in foreground, moving picture cameraman. Colorized picture. Location: Between Chevrières and Grand Pré, Ardennes, France. October 19, 1918. NARA Ref#: 111-SC-27138. Courtesy Harry B. Kidd
Link to high res image

Edouart's early experiences in the film business during the First World War are shrouded in ambiguity because of conflicting reports. According to some references, when the United States entered World War I, Edouart enlisted in the Signal Corps which was assigned to arrange for the pictorial coverage of the Great War. Due to a bureaucratic tangle, he was at first not sent to France but attended the Signal Corps' cinematographers course at Columbia University. It was said he was so gifted with his craft that the university administrators invited him to stay on board as an instructor after he graduated.

Capturing the Great War in France

Edouart may indeed have attented the military school of cinematography at Columbia University in 1918, but he is definitely not listed as an instructor in the official document on this photographic school. There is no reference to Edouart in the list that mentions all staff members of this school. He did go the France later on in 1918 to capture the Great War with his camera, but the reports on his photographic activities with the Signal Corps are muddled. According to a number of sources, Edouart played a major role in the U.S. Signal Corps photographic work during World War I, to such an extent that he even rose to become chief of the photo section of the 78th Division of the American Expeditionary Force.

Again, there is some truth in these stories because Edouart was with the 78th Division of the American Expeditionary Force while serving in France. But the U.S. Signal Corps records at the National Archives do not mention a commission for him as a photographic officer with this American division. As a matter of

fact, research by Harry B. Kidd clearly identifies Edouart as a private soldier attached to the 78th Division. We have his picture taken on the Western Front only a couple of weeks before the Armistice, on October 14 and 19, 1918, at Chatel-Chéhéry in the French Ardennes. His rank then was a private, definitely not a lieutenant in charge of a U.S. photographic team for an American Division. In this picture Edouart apparently is working with a still camera, but we do know that he also shot film at the close of World War I. His personal papers which are now at the Hoover Institution Archives refer to motion pictures taken by him at the end of the First World War for the American Red Cross in Normandy and Brittany. This interesting collection shows that he was promoted to Sergeant 1st Class at the close of the Great War and the documents definitely merit further research.

Edouart filming in the Sahara desert, circa 1920

Filming with the American Red Cross

Shortly after World War I Edouart left the Signal Corps and became a cinematographer for the American Red Cross, filming relief work in Greece, Albania, the Balkans and the African Sahara. Details about his work with the Red Cross are sketchy but it appears that he was in Montenegro in the summer of 1919, filming refugees in the Balkans at a time when he had been commissioned into the American Red Cross as a Major. He also worked for the Red Cross together with Merl LaVoy, the famous American war photographer who had been with the French army in 1916 and had shot his film *Heroic France* on the battlefields of the Somme and Verdun. In 1920, LaVoy and Edouart were working together in Algeria, taking pictures for the American Red Cross; here is a link to a collection of photographs that were shot by LaVoy at this time.

Also, here is a download link to a contemporary newspaper story on the Red Cross film work shortly after World War I, which also mentions Major Edouart and Merl LaVoy.

Alexander Edouart retired from the movie industry in 1967. Despite numerous surgeries to save his sight, he became totally blind during the last years of his life and died on March 17, 1980. He was buried at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, California.

With special thanks to Harry Kidd for his research and input on this weblog

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:56 AM 2 comments:

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2018

Sailing for France - Cameraman Victor Fleming

The collection of the National Archives recently revealed two World War I pictures of a cameraman who would become one of the most famous movie directors in Hollywood history: Victor Fleming. Academy Award-winning director Victor Fleming helmed many successful films, most notably 1939's *Gone with the Wind* and *The Wizard of Oz*.

Lt. Victor Fleming (right) with movie camera on board SS *George Washington*, December 1918. Colorized picture from the Signal Corps collection in the National Archives.
Link to original high res image

When America entered World War I Fleming, like most men of his age, was drafted. Though he would have preferred to stay in the film industry, making movies for Douglas Fairbanks, Fleming joined the U.S. Signal Corps Photographic Division and was commissioned as a Lieutenant. He made training films, but most of his pictures seem to have been taken for a comprehensive pictorial history of the U.S. in the Great War. Fleming was President Wilson's chief cameraman on his first visit to France.

Signal Corps Pictures

The Signal Corps photographs that we found were taken in December 1918 when Fleming was on board the SS *George Washington* to capture President Wilson's visit to Europe. We see him rolling film behind his Bell & Howell movie camera, together with two other American officers. Another shot has a wonderful close up of Fleming in his uniform.

Lieutenant Victor Fleming, U.S. Signal Corps, December 1918. Colorized photograph.
Link to high res image

We mentioned Fleming briefly in a previous weblog on his work as an instructor at the American School of Military Cinematography that was set up at Columbia University in 1918.

This issue of the *Columbia News Record* (March 2016) has more on Fleming's work at the School of Military Cinematography.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:48 AM 1 comment:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 29, 2018

Movie Stars on Liberty Loan Drive (USA, 1918)

During World War I the American government sold Liberty Bonds to support the Allied cause. Subscribing to the bonds became a symbol of patriotic duty in the United States.

The response to the first Liberty Bond was unenthusiastic and Secretary of the Treasury William Gibbs McAdoo reacted to the sales problems by creating an aggressive campaign to popularize the bonds. The government used the Committee on Public Information, America's wartime propaganda agency, to help sell Liberty Bonds. Famous movie stars such as Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks and Charlie Chaplin were among the celebrities that made public appearances promoting the idea that purchasing a liberty bond was the patriotic thing to do.

4th Liberty Loan poster (1918)

Hollywood Film Stars

The National Archives in Washington, D.C., has an interesting 5-reel film on various Liberty Loan campaigns that were organized throughout the country. Reel 2 is of special interest because it shows film stars Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, and Marie Dressler selling bonds during a Washington parade. Reel 3 has scenes showing Japanese movie star Sessue Hayakawa and Blanche Sweet speaking and selling bonds in Hollywood.

We uploaded these scenes showing the American film stars promoting Liberty Loans on our YouTube channel.

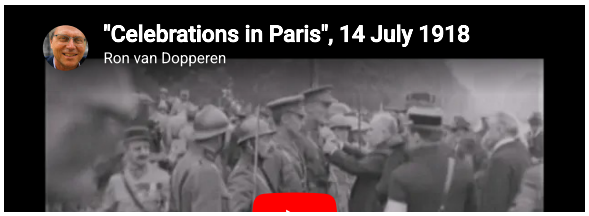
Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:08 AM 2 comments:

FRIDAY, AUGUST 24, 2018

"Celebrations in Paris" (France, 14 July 1918)

Here is a short clip that was found recently in the collection of the Imperial War Museum, showing an official American cinematographer at work during the celebrations of the 14th of July 1918 in Paris.

Unfortunately, we could not establish the identity of the cameraman.



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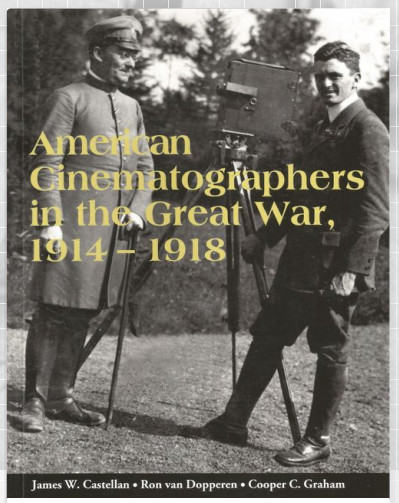

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Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company*. James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

WEDNESDAY, JULY 25, 2018

German War Films at the National Archives

While researching Wilbur H. Durborough's World War I feature film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (1915) we came across an interesting collection of contemporary German war films at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Among the scenes not only was lost footage from Durborough's movie but a lot more historical film on the First World War.

German film camera crew at the Western Front, June 1917. Colorized photo from the Imperial War Museum

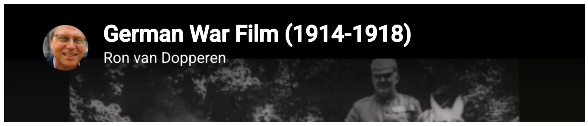
The Durborough film scenes were found in a five-reel Signal Corps collection which seems to have been assembled during the Great War. The U.S. Signal Corps apparently considered these films valuable enough to add to its archives, if only for military intelligence purposes. As a result, we were able to retrieve quite a number of pictures from Durborough's World War I film, notably scenes showing the Imperial German family, the American reporters at the Hotel Adlon in Berlin, prisoners of war at a POW camp in Doeberitz, Germany, and a substantial number of scenes that were shot by Durborough and his camera assistant Ries on the invasion of East Prussia by the Russian army.

Synopsis

Here is a synopsis of this Signal Corps film:

> *Reel 1, Crown Prince William reviews Army units. Gen. von Hindenburg poses. Cavalry, artillery, and wagon trains move through Berlin; troops entrain. Heavy artillery pounds Antwerp. Infantrymen don packs. Reel 2, supply trains enter an East Prussian town. Soldiers load refugees into wagons. Shows a German railroad gun. German trenches at Somme, France, are shelled. Fort Conde, near Soissons, is entered; cavalry units pursue the fleeing French. Reel 3 shows machine guns firing. Belgians surrender cows to German troops. An airplane is loaded with bombs, flies over trenches and Verdun, bombs a British G.H.Q., battles Allied planes, and lands at its base. Reel 4, German troops pass and the Kaiser inspects captured British tanks near Cambrai. Italian prisoners are captured in the Tyrol sector. Reel 5, French prisoners are taken to the rear. Prisoners march, bale hay, and dig rocks in a prison camp. Turkish troops place their wounded on camels. Camels and horses are watered in Turkey.*

We have uploaded these German war films on our YouTube channel.



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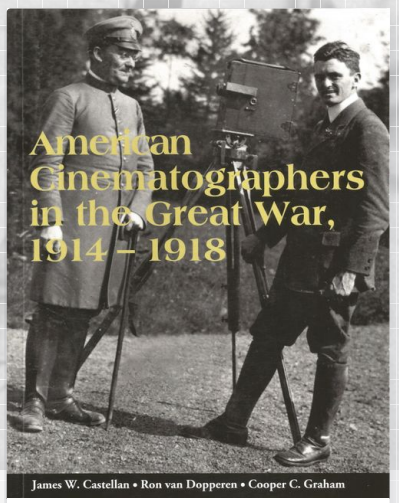

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German War Films at the National Archives
The War Diary of Albert K. Dawson (1915)
The War Photographer - Ernest Brooks

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:31 AM 5 comments:

TUESDAY, JULY 17, 2018

The War Diary of Albert K. Dawson (1915)

In 2011, authors Ron van Dopperen and Cooper C. Graham published an article for *Film History* journal on cameraman Albert K. Dawson. The paper examines Dawson's experiences during World War I based on excerpts from his published diary and other documentary sources, as well as portions of his films recently discovered in the Library of Congress's John E. Allen collection.

Albert K. Dawson in camp before Przemyśl, May 1915. Colorized photo reproduced from the collection of the National Archives in Washington, D.C.
Link to original high res image

Extraordinary Research Opportunity

Our discovery of Dawson's war diary was an extraordinary opportunity. We knew he kept a notebook on his film adventures during World War I. And just when we thought we would never find it, parts of his diary were located in the magazine *Deutsch-Amerika*. In a series of five weekly articles the magazine ran a feature story on Dawson's experiences as a cameraman, following the trail of the German and Austro-Hungarian army in the summer of 1915. The decision by the editor to publish parts of his war diary is something to be grateful for because it provides us with a unique source for World War I film history. It also gives us the opportunity to witness a major military campaign on the Eastern Front, as seen through the lens of an American camera correspondent.

Filming the American Attack on Château-Thierry (We...
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Dawson when he was a Captain in the U.S. Signal Corps laboratory in Washington, D.C. (November 1917)
Link to high res image

The historical significance of Dawson's war diary is confirmed by Oswald Denkmayr in his study *Kurbelmann in Kriegsdienst* (2012) on the Austrian World War I cinematographers of the KuK Kriegspressequartier. According to Denkmayr, Dawson's notebook is the only first-hand account that he could find and that has survived of a World War I film cameraman who accompanied the Austro-Hungarian army during the First World War. Denkmayr's study was written while we were researching Dawson and has a number of references to our article for *Film History* journal.

Here is a download link to Denkmayr's excellent thesis for the University of Vienna in 2012.

Albert Dawson inspecting the battlefields around Przemyśl, June 1915

Dawson at the Eastern front with Austrian artillery battery (1915)
Press photograph, private collection Ron van Dopperen
Link to scan original press photograph

The Road to Ivangorod (1915)

In his diary Dawson describes how he gained access to the frontline in the summer of 1915 and covered the attack on Ivangorod in Russian Poland. All photographs with an asterisk in this magazine were taken by Dawson. His original notes were translated into German for this publication.

Because of its unique and historical value we have scanned and uploaded all five articles by Dawson from his war diary. You are free to read and download his own story here.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:25 AM No comments:

MONDAY, JULY 9, 2018

The War Photographer - Ernest Brooks

Ernest Brooks, the first official British photographer in World War I, featured in a special episode of the YouTube channel *The Great War* that was broadcasted in October 2016.

An example of Brooks' iconic World War I pictures: Soldiers of the 8th Battalion, East Yorkshire Regiment, going up the line in the Ypres Salient, 1917

Ernest Brooks' photos from World War I have become icons of the entire war and are even recognized today. But his experience as an official war photographer was not always glorious and especially in the beginning he staged photos instead of showing the real horrors of the war. But as the war dragged on, more and more photos by Brooks captured small moments in this gigantic conflict that showed the humanity behind the numbers.

Episode *The Great War*

You can watch the episode on Brooks photographic work in World War I here on this weblog. You can subscribe to this interesting YouTube show on the Great War and watch a new video report on the First World War every Monday, Thursday and Saturday.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:27 AM No comments:

WEDNESDAY, JULY 4, 2018

Filming the American Attack on Château-Thierry (Western Front, 1918)

In July 1918, Lieutenant Edwin H. Cooper - photographic officer of the 26th "Yankee" Division - filmed the American attack on the German lines near Château-Thierry. For his extraordinary bravery during this offensive Lt. Cooper received the Distinguished Service Cross.

Edwin Cooper with his movie camera during the attack on Château-Thierry, 20 July 1918. Signal Corps colorized photograph from the National Archives. Courtesy Harry B. Kidd.
Link to high res image

In fact, both Cooper and his movie camera operator Sergeant Eikleberry were awarded with the Distinguished Service Cross. Cooper's report on how his photographic team covered the attack with their cameras is one of the

best documented first-hand accounts on World War I battle cinematography. It is extraordinary that after one hundred years Cooper's personal account has never been given proper credits before because his story has all the vivid details and inside information one can hope for. In his memoirs Cooper tells how he set up his photographic work, having arrived in France in October 1917 as one of the first official military cameramen of the U.S. Signal Corps. Two of his cameramen got wounded in July 1918 while covering the attack on Château-Thierry. Lieutenant Cooper himself also risked his life then while assisting in the evacuation of wounded soldiers and taking in a large group of German prisoners.

War Films Found at the National Archives

We were extremely fortunate in having found footage from the National Archives, that was shot by Lieutenant Cooper shortly after he had gone over the top during this attack in the summer of 1918. These pictures fully match his story and illustrate how Cooper against all odds managed to capture the attack on film. His film - partly retrieved also at the Imperial War Museum - as well as numerous pictures of his photographic work with the 26th U.S. Division all make it possible to reconstruct Cooper's story on how he and his fellow cameramen filmed World War I. It is a truly remarkable story that definitely needs to be preserved for history, so we have edited Cooper's account into a video on the making of his war films.

Scene from Lt. Cooper's war films for the U.S. Signal Corps

The Cameraman: Edwin Cooper

Born in Wilmington, Delaware in 1881, Edwin Cooper started working as a photographer at an early age. From 1911 he worked with the celebrated photo artist William Rau in Philadelphia and before the outbreak of World War I he had also taken up the movie camera, making travelogues in South America. Cooper was promoted to Captain in September 1918 when he was assigned to the 5th U.S. Army Corps as photographic officer. During the Meuse-Argonne battle he was in charge of pictorial coverage for this corps. Throughout his life he remained active as a photographic reporter and lecturer, producing three color documentaries during World War II. In November 1948, while fishing out on Silver Lake near Harrisville, NH, Cooper fell from his boat and was drowned. He was buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

Cooper's report on his film coverage during World War I was originally printed in the American photographic trade magazines. You can read and download an extended version here.

Reconstructed with still photographs and moving pictures, here is Cooper's personal story on how he and his fellow cameramen filmed the American attack on Château-Thierry.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:22 AM 2 comments:

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Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 27, 2018

U.S. Signal Corps Cameraman Wesley Strait (1918-1919)

A private photo album of an official World War I cameraman is something extremely rare. So we were surprised to find such a collection recently on Niles Laughner's Military Antiques weblog. These pictures all come from U.S. Signal Corps photographer Wesley Strait's personal estate.

Strait was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1893. At an early age Wesley shared an interest in photography with his twin brother Jess and both young men soon started working as a press photographer for the New York newspapers. When the motion picture industry expanded across the country Wesley also learned how to handle a movie camera and in 1917 he became a cinematographer for the Vitagraph Company which was then operating in Flatbush, Brooklyn.

Wesley Strait (France, 1918)
Link to low res image

Filming for the U.S. Signal Corps

When the U.S. entered World War I both Strait brothers joined the U.S. Signal Corps which has been assigned to cover the American theater of war in France. In a production file of a Signal Corps film, now at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., we recently found a reference to Wesley Strait, mentioning his work at the Filing Department of the Signal Corps photographic laboratory near Paris during World War I. This department was responsible for filing all film and preparing all original negatives for shipment to the United States.

Niles Laughner has this wonderful description on Strait's World War I pictures:

> *His album, in the permanent collection, is huge. Somehow, Strait managed to get into most of the images, as in the ambulance shot ... he is on the stretcher! He had lots of girlfriends, some of which are shown here. He witnessed the wonders that most Americans then (and perhaps now) had only read about ... the Moulin Rouge for instance. He colored many of the shots, an example here has him with North African French troops ... and that's him with the movie camera. The image with his mom (family resemblence ...!!) and either a sister or girlfriend and the family cat is a lovely shot taken before he left for Europe. I suppose no one really remembers him, but his photos, and his sense of humor in some of them, survives him in this album.*

Strait's personal autographed picture of World War I military commanders (1919)

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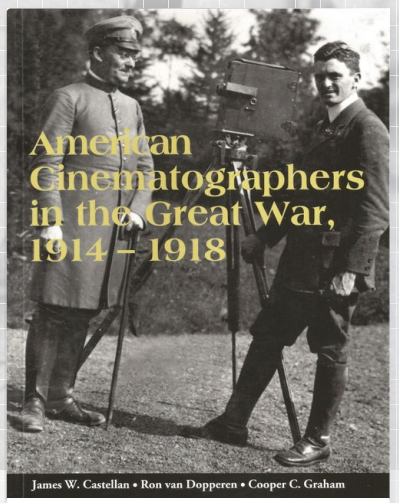

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U.S. Signal Corps Cameraman Wesley Strait (1918-1919)

Work after World War I

After his return to America Wesley Strait worked for the *New York World*, the *World-Telegram* and the *Daily Mirror*. He was the official photographer of the New York World's Fair (1939) and a member of the Press Photographers Association of New York. After his work for the World's Fair, he did freelance photography up to 1942 when he was employed by the Grumman Aircraft Engineering Corporation, a war industry.

On December 16, 1942, Wesley Strait died unexpectedly at the age of 49 as a result of a stroke at Adelphi Hospital in Brooklyn, New York City.

We have uploaded a selection of pictures from his personal album on our photo channel.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:38 AM 2 comments:

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 20, 2018

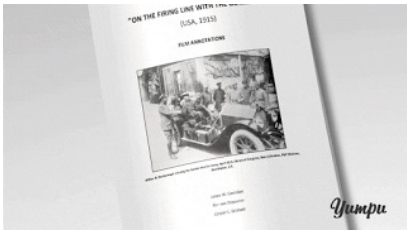
World War I Films in Color

In 2014, the same team that collaborated on the renowned World War II series *Apocalypse* produced a similar documentary series on the Great War. As with the previous production, the new series has some remarkable colored footage including scenes from Wilbur H. Durborough's film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (1915).

Durborough and General von Schlieffen in East Prussia, June 1915

Online Release *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (USA, 1915)

As described in a previous weblog, Durborough's film has been restored by the Library of Congress and the movie was uploaded on the internet in November 2016. After almost one hundred years an original World War I film is back on the screen. To coincide with this online release the authors prepared an extended story on the making of Durborough's remarkable war film. Based on our previous book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*, we added new information that was found in early 2016 in the German archives as well as in the American and Dutch newspapers.



World War I Films in Color
American War Correspondents at the Front
Watching American World War I Newsreels
Ernest Schoedsack - Cameraman with the U.S. Signal...
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We recently prepared a new, extended story on Durborough's photographic work during World War I. You can read this Durborough Film Annotation (2nd edition) here.

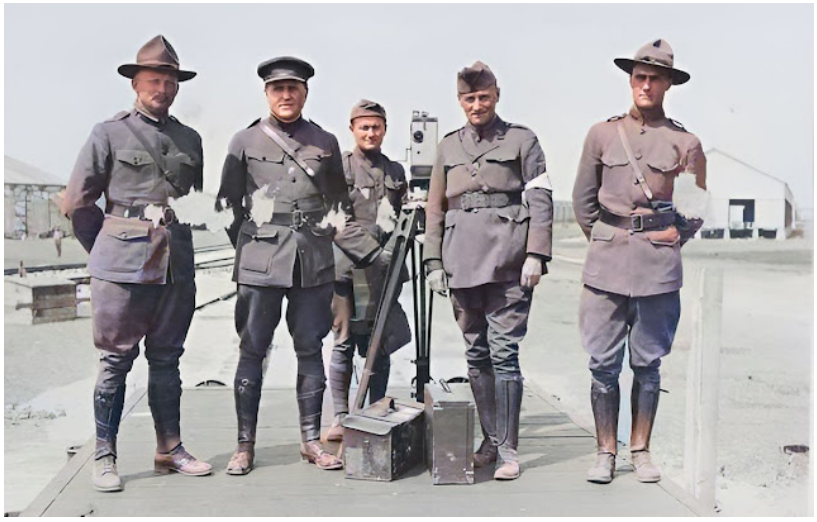
If you are interested to see Durborough in color here is a scene from *Apocalypse World War I*, episode 2, showing his film work at the Eastern Front in 1915.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:56 AM No comments:

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 13, 2018

American War Correspondents at the Front

The National Archives in Washington, D.C. once again revealed an interesting collection on World War I. An excellent series of pictures showing American war correspondents at the front was found recently by the authors.



Adrian C. Duff (U.S. Signal Corps) with his movie camera camera, together with American reporters. St. Nazaire, France, 2 July 1918. Colorized picture from the National Archives in Washington, D.C.
Link to original high res image

Photographic Files at the National Archives

The photographs are from Record Group 165 "Unofficial Collection of World War I Photographs". This group is part of the files of the Historical Branch, War Plans Division, War Department General Staff, and was assembled by the Committee on Public Information (CPI), America's propaganda agency during the First World War.

In these pictures are some correspondents that we mentioned in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*. Most of the journalists were newspaper reporters, such as Herbert Corey who was in Germany at the beginning of 1915 and after the American entry into World War I went to France. We also found a wonderful series of photographs showing Irvin S. Cobb who covered the Great War for the *Saturday Evening Post*. Cobb wrote a book about his experiences, published in 1915, titled *Paths Of Glory*. After a second visit to France with the American Expeditionary Force he succesfully publicized the achievements of the unit known as the "Harlem Hellfighters". One of the pictures that we found shows Cobb with General Doyen (U.S. Marine Corps) in France.

Cameraman Albert K. Dawson

As far as cameramen are concerned, we found two pictures in these files, showing Albert K. Dawson who accompanied the German and the Austrian army during the First World War for the American Correspondent Film

Company. The picture showing him before his tent during the siege of Przemyśl in May 1915 is without a doubt the best image reproduction we have ever seen. There is another photograph showing Dawson in a German military car when he visited Belgium in January 1915.

Albert K. Dawson (right) in military car at Antwerp, January 1915. Third from left: Josef Schumacher of the Zentralstelle für Auslandsdienst (ZfA). Colorized photo © Brown & Dawson. From the collection of the National Archives. Download link to original high res photograph here.

This picture is also in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*, and the reproduction has Dawson's personal handwritten comments on his trip through Belgium. The high res scanned image from the collection of the National Archives for the first time reveals the identity of the man in the middle: Josef Schumacher, who was in charge of pictorial publicity for the Zentralstelle für Auslandsdienst, Germany's foreign propaganda agency during World War I. This once again confirms the story we have described in more detail in our previous publications about the use of Dawson's pictures by the Germans for propaganda purposes.

Finally the picture file at the National Archives also shows cameraman Adrian C. Duff who was a news photographer and joined the U.S. Signal Corps in 1917. Duff made national headlines in 1912 when he got in a plane with aviator Frank T. Coffyn and for the first time in history photographed New York City from above.

There is more on Duff and his World War I pictures in this previous weblog.

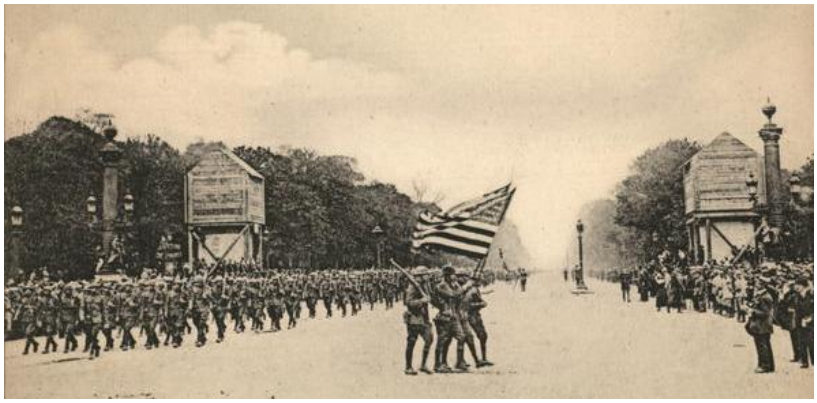
We uploaded this collection to our photo channel on Flickr, and you are free to download these photographs here.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:30 AM 2 comments:

SATURDAY, JUNE 9, 2018

Watching American World War I Newsreels

Watch silent movies with new musical scores by renowned silent film accompanist Ben Model. Some of these are from DVD releases (uploaded with permission) and some are rare one-of-a-kind 16mm prints of lost films in Ben Model's collection.



American troops on parade in Paris, 4 July 1918

Parade 4th of July in Paris

To give you a feeling what it must have been like to watch a newsreel during World War I here is Ben Model's presentation of a 1918 newsreel showing U.S. troop on parade in Paris on the Fourth of July.

The original footage comes from a contemporary British Gaumont newsreel which was issued for home use after the Great War on 16 mm format around 1948. American troops as well as Red Cross nurses are seen parading along the Champs Elysee and the Place de la Concorde. The film segment ends with footage of President Poincare and General Foch. The musical score is by Ben Model © 2012.

You can watch all of Ben Model's silent film presentations on his YouTube channel here.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:14 AM 1 comment:

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 6, 2018

Ernest Schoedsack - Cameraman with the U.S. Signal Corps (1918)

Best remembered as co-director of the 1933 classic *King Kong*, Ernest B. Schoedsack was a pioneering documentary film maker who was one of the first cameramen to take his movie camera into the Thai jungle and covered the nomadic tribes of Iran. His name on the Hollywood Walk of Fame testifies to his extraordinary skills as a film director, producer and cinematographer.

Ernest B. Schoedsack (1919) when he was making movies in Poland
Link to low res image

Adventure Story

Schoedsack's life and career has all the makings of an adventure story. Born in Council Bluffs, Iowa, on June 8, 1893, Schoedsack ran away from home at the age of twelve and headed for California. By the time he was seventeen he was working as a cameraman for the Mack Sennett studio. During World War I Schoedsack shot numerous comedies for Mack Sennett, and he also was listed as cinematographer for the Mabel Normand Film Company. When in 1917 America declared war on Germany, Schoedsack enlisted in the Photographic Division of the Signal Corps and was sent to France.

Most of Schoedsack's biographies only have a few words on his film work during the First World War. Apart from Kevin Brownlow's excellent research - he interviewed Schoedsack on his World War I experiences - not much is known about this extraordinary episode in his film career. As is shown in his World War I Registration Card, Schoedsack was very much interested in the military. From 1915 he was a non-commissioned officer for the National Coast Guard in California. Initially he expected to be sent to the U.S. Coast Guard but there simply wasn't any call for anti-aircraft. When he learned about the new Signal Corps Photographic Division, which was set up to cover the Great War, Schoedsack soon applied for a position. After a brief stint as an instructor at the Columbia School of Military Cinematography Schoedsack was sent to France.

Sailing for France

The shipping records of the American Expeditionary Force show Schoedsack sailed on the SS *Covington* from Hoboken, New Jersey, on June 15, 1918. He was listed as a private soldier, assigned to the U.S. Signal Corps Photographic Division. Schoedsack at first was assigned to the Signal Corps photographic laboratory near Paris. Shortly before his death, Schoedsack recalled his experiences in an interview with Kevin Brownlow:

> *"We finally reached Paris, and were taken off to Vincennes. The Signal Corps occupied the Pathé chateau, and they had a laboratory and cutting rooms on the fourth floor of the Pathé factory. The other floors were being used as a gas mask factory. The gentleman in command was a very nice old bloke. He had been an optometrist up in Oakland. He was a reservist in the National Guard, and they*

had to give him a job someplace. So, optometrist pertaining to lenses, lenses to photography - voila! The only officer remotely connected to the picture business was Al Kaufman. The other three executive officers were characters they had no use for anywhere else. The general idea was to stay in Paris and have fun."

Schoedsack was now getting impatient - he wanted to get to the front and film the Great War:

"I complained a lot, and agitated a lot, and finally they said, 'You want to go the front? All right, you can go to the front. A cameraman (Harris Thorpe) pulled out of the combat area and I got my chance. I wanted a light camera. Oh, no. They gave me this damn great Bell and Howell and this great trunk. It weighed a hundred pounds. They needed the light cameras, the Debries, down in Paris, I guess, where all the action was. I had no directive, no passes, no nothing. They didn't even give me a gas mask or a helmet, although I did get a .45 and some ammunition. I got a truck down the combat zone, but an MP stopped me because I had no gas mask or helmet. There were some fresh graves by the side of the road, and one of them had a gas mask and a helmet. The helmet was bashed in on one side, and I remember the name inside was Kelly. Anyway, that got me into the combat zone. There was hardly any activity in the daytime. All the barraging and banging around was at night. Photographically, there was very little you could do."

Cameraman with the 77th Division, A.E.F.

In his interview with Kevin Brownlow Schoedsack did not mention when he was sent to the front but thanks to research by Harry B. Kidd we are now able to reconstruct parts of his film work during World War I and identify some of the movie scenes that he shot while he was in France. On August 25, 1918, Schoedsack's picture was taken in the destroyed village of Mareuil-en-Dôle. This was in the Aisne region, near Château-Thierry. The picture shows Schoedsack cranking a Bell & Howell movie camera among the ruins of a church. The captions mentions he was a private soldier with the Photo Unit of the 77th Division of the American Expeditonary Force (A.E.F.).

Ernest B. Schoedsack at the front in France, during the afttermath of the battle at Château-Thierry with the 77th Division, A.E.F. Colorized photograph. Indentification by Harry B. Kidd. Link to Harry's original post on Flickr

Bahman Maghsoudlou in his book on the making of Schoedsack's film *Grass* (1925) mentions that on his arrival in France Schoedsack was placed at the head of the Photographic Unit of the 77th Division. This would have made him a Lieutenant 2nd Class, commanding a team of still and movie photographers. Schoedsack indeed stayed with the 77th Division until the end of the First World War, and he must have recorded many film scenes for this American Division that are now in the National Archives in Washington, D.C., notably "Occupation of the Baccarat Sector" (111-H-1300), "Oise-Aisne Operations" (111-H-1358) and "Meuse-Argonne Offensive" (111-H-1417). But the contemporary records do not produce any evidence that Schoedsack was commissioned as a photographic officer. For example on October 23, 1918, Schoedsack went into a plane and filmed the German lines above the Argonne frontline sector that had just been captured from the enemy. Thanks to research by Harry B. Kidd, the production records have been retrieved. These documents show Schoedsack was a private soldier when recording these scenes just a couple of weeks before the end of World War I.

After the Great War

Schoedsack was discharged from the American Expeditionary Force in February 1919, but he did not immediately go back to the United States. After the Armistice he joined the American Red Cross and worked on behalf of Polish war relief, helping thousand of Poles escape the Russian occupied territories. Schoedsack at this time also met his lifelong friend and fellow film maker, Merian C. Cooper who, like Schoedsack, was a fervent anti-Bolshevik and also an aspiring film director. Together they filmed the war between Poland and Russia. Shortly afterwards, Schoedsack also covered the war between Greece and Turkey for the American newsreels.

Ernest Schoedsack, filming a Polish wedding dance, 1920. From the collection of the Library of Congress
Link to low res image

During World War II Schoedsack served in the Air Force. While testing equipment in a tank at Edwards Air Force Base, a shell exploded nearby and his head hit the bottom of the tank turret, detaching the eye retina. Subsequent operations couldn't repair the damage and Schoedsack was virtually blind for the last 35 years of his life.

Ernest Beaumont Schoedsack died on December 23, 1979. He was buried at Westwood Village Memorial Park Cemetery in Los Angeles.

With special thanks to Harry Kidd for his research and input on this weblog

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 12:03 PM No comments:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company*. James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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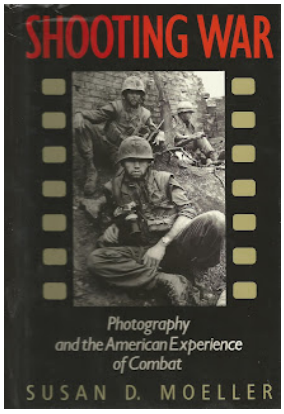
First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

WEDNESDAY, MAY 30, 2018

Susan Moeller's "Shooting War" (1989)

Susan Moeller's *Shooting War* (1989) still ranks as one of the most interesting and comprehensive studies on the history of American war photography.



The best war photography, Moeller demonstrates, bares the essence of war by distilling the chaos of combat into indelible visual icons, like the flag-raising on Iwo Jima or the naked, napalmed young Vietnamese girl. When Teddy Roosevelt led his troops up the San Juan hills, most Americans still believed in war as a glorious adventure, and photographers dutifully memorialized that romantic conceit. Seventy years later, horrific images from Vietnam helped convince millions that war was little more than organized murder.

Pictorial Censorship in World War I

Shooting War is full of first-hand accounts by the finest photographers who risked their lives in pursuit of the elusive "truths" of war. And although the book mainly deals with still photographers it did provide us with a lot of useful background information when we started our research on the American film cameramen of the First World War.

As described by Moeller, in contrast to the anything-goes attitude of the Spanish-American War, World War I saw the establishment of military censorship of information emanating from the battle zone. Where picture captions sent from Cuba in 1898 mentioned specific locations and dates, captions during the Great War invariably settled for such generalities as "Our Heroes at the Front." Subject matter was censored as well. Photographs depicting the dead, the dying, or the wounded were suppressed, purportedly in deference to the feelings of those back home and, more probably, for fear of sparking antiwar sentiments.

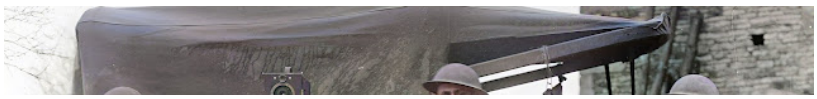
Here are some scenes from an interview with Susan Moeller which was broadcasted by C-SPAN when her book was first published.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:19 AM No comments:

WEDNESDAY, MAY 23, 2018

Counterattack with a Camera at Cantigny (May 1918)

On May 28, 1918, Signal Corps cameraman Edward R. Trabold went over the top with the 1st Division of the American Expeditionary Force, taking combat pictures of American soldiers in action at Cantigny. The battle of Cantigny is best remembered now as the first major American offensive of World War I.



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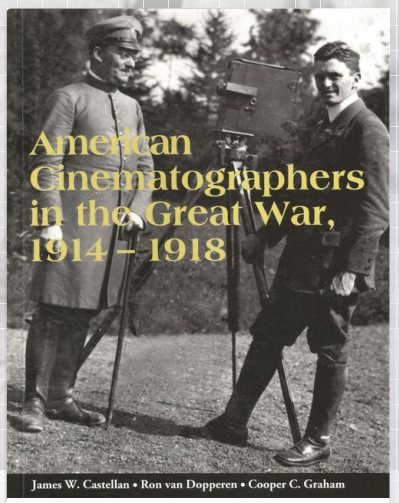

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Captured on Film by U.S. Cameramen - The Romanov Murder Scene (1918)

World War I Combat Camera Edwin F. Weigle Found!

Anatomy of an Authentic World War I Combat Scene (1915)

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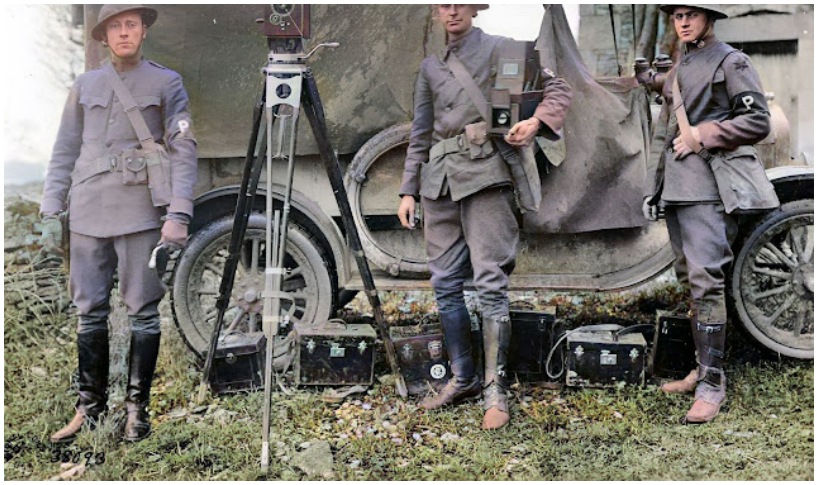
Susan Moeller's "Shooting War" (1989)



Photographic unit of the 6th Division, A.E.F, 1919. Trabold with his Graflex camera is in the middle. Colorized photograph from the National Archives, courtesy Harry B. Kidd
Link to high res image

Trabold's personal story *Counterattacking with a Camera* on his experiences at Cantigny was published in 1919. He was by all accounts the first official U.S. Signal Corps photographer to take combat pictures of American soldiers during a major offensive in the First World War. Unfortunately, Trabold had to give his pictures to the Signal Corps. When he published his personal account he could not show any of the photographs that he had made during the attack, but reports indicate these pictures were of tanks and the men of the 1st Infantry Division storming Cantigny. The prints probably are still at the National Archives in Washington, D.C, and definitely merit additional research.

The Cameraman: Edward R. Trabold

During this assignment Trabold was accompanied by his commanding officer, Captain Paul Miller, who had been sent to Europe by the Signal Corps in May 1917 to report on the possibilities of setting up a photographic laboratory in France. Trabold himself is another interesting figure. Born in North Addams, Massachussets, in 1883, he started his first studio in 1906 with an old 4 x 5 Graflex camera as his principal piece of photography. Joined in the enterprise by his brother Peter, who had been teaching art, he specialized in producing photograph buttons, a novelty at the time, bearing pictures of loved ones and public figures. Trabold later became a newspaper photographer, working in Montana, and enlisted in the Signal Corps in 1917. After the war, Trabold became a newsreel cameraman for *Pathé News*, working in Omaha, Nebraska, where he had set up a new photographic studio. In the 1950s, Trabold was also active producing films for television.

Trabold in Signal Corps photographic laboratory near Paris, April 1918. Picture from the collection of the National Archives in Washington, D.C.
Link to original Signal Corps photograph (15 Mb)

First Combat Photographer

Shortly before his death in December 1955, Trabold corresponded with the Signal Corps on his photographic work during World War I. He was quite anxious to know if he was in fact the first cameraman to have taken combat pictures of the American Expeditionary Force at Cantigny. The Signal Corps after careful consideration replied that he probably was. Trabold appears to have taken both still and moving pictures when he was in France. The attack on Cantigny he only covered with a still camera. In his account Trabold mentioned no movie cameras were allowed because these would draw enemy fire. It still was a very dangerous job. Trabold was wounded by machine-gun fire and escaped from death by shells that were falling all around. At the end of the day he arrived at a medical station where his wounds were treated.

"The Big Red One"

Counterattack with a Camera at Cantigny (May 1918)
Lost and Found: The German Naval High Command (1916)
America's First Official War Newsreel (1918)
Filming the German Attack on Novo Georgievsk (1915)
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Colonel Robert R. McCormick in World War I

On an interesting side note, Colonel Robert R. McCormick , editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, was an officer with the 1st "The Big Red One" Division during the attack at Cantigny. McCormick was instrumental in innovating his newspaper, and he worked closely with cinematographers Edwin Weigle and Donald Thompson on a number of contemporary World War I films that were released by the *Chicago Tribune*. You will find more on his work in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War.*

Here is an audio link with a speech by McCormick, commemorating the historical significance of the American attack at Cantigny.

After his harrowing experiences at Cantigny, Edward Trabold was promoted to Sergeant 1st Class and transferred to the 6th Division, A.E.F. He was in the field as an official photographer from March 1918 until May 1919 when he was discharged from the Signal Corps.

Here is a download link to Trabold's story *Counterattacking with a Camera* which was published in the *Photographic Journal of America* in September 1919.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:51 AM 2 comments:

WEDNESDAY, MAY 16, 2018

Lost and Found: The German Naval High Command (1916)

In an earlier weblog we mentioned our discovery of films shot by American cinematographer Nelson E. Edwards in June 1916, showing the German Naval High Command shortly after the Battle of Jutland. We recently came across similar footage taken by Edwards in the CBS Collection at the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

Edwards and German naval officer, June 1916. Courtesy Wiegman family
Link to scan newspaper clipping

Edwards's film work in wartime Germany has been described in more detail in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*. He ranked among the first, pioneering newsreel cameramen in American film history. From 1914 Edwards filmed for Hearst International News Service and covered the Mexican Revolution. In 1916 he filmed the Turkish and the German side of the World War. He was also chief cameraman for Fox Newsreel during the year of its birth in 1919, and thereafter a longtime stringer for *Paramount News*.

In 2016, we found four scenes taken by Edwards, featuring Admiral von Hipper and his staff, as well as Admiral Scheer visiting his flag ship *Friedrich der Grosse*. The footage is on 35 mm and the original negatives are from the Grinberg Collection. As it turns out, CBS also used the Grinberg Collection while assembling film for their World War I TV series in 1964. After the series was edited CBS in a magnificent gesture turned its unused footage over to the National Archives - a real boon for researchers. And that's how Edwards' World War I films ended up in the National Archives.

Films Found at the National Archives

The scenes that we located at the National Archives are on a reel with stock newsreels excerpts (CBS-WW1-75) that were not used by CBS for the TV series. These show Admiral von Hipper and his staff, as well as a close up of Admiral Scheer. The intertitle mentions *Hearst International News Pictorial*, the film company Edwards worked for. Similar scenes shot by Edwards were used by CBS in the World War I TV series. Episode 7 on the Battle of Jutland in the CBS series has a scene showing Admiral Scheer boarding his flag ship, as well as a shot showing Scheer and his staff, posing for Edwards' movie camera.

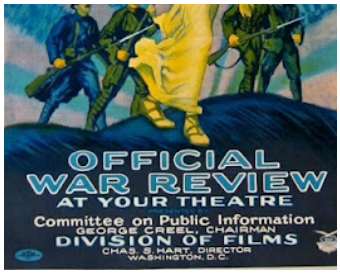
We have uploaded the outtakes found at the National Archives, as well as the scenes from the CBS TV series that were used, on our YouTube channel.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:19 AM No comments:

WEDNESDAY, MAY 9, 2018

America's First Official War Newsreel (1918)

On July 1, 1918 America's first official war newsreel was launched. Distributed in the United States by Pathé, the *Official War Review* contained scenes from wartime Europe, shot by military cameramen of the U.S. Signal Corps and other Allied countries.



Film poster *Official War Review* (USA, 1918)

Link to low res image

The *Official War Review* was produced by the Committee on Public Information (CPI), America's propaganda agency. As described in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*, the newsreel had a difficult start. The CPI intended to offer the newsreel to all film companies on equal conditions and the same price. This hardly suited the competitive American film industry which wanted to show exclusive pictures. Pathé finally was contracted to distribute the best of what the CPI could offer to show a weekly official newsreel on the American soldiers fighting in France.

Copies from Pordenone Silent Film Festival

By modern standards America's first official war newsreel lacks the fast moving images we are used to watch today. The shots are mostly static and there is little real battlefront footage. But for the American audience back in 1918 this was their weekly update on what happened at the front in Europe. The Pordenone Silent Film Festival in 2015 showed six newsreels from this series, which are from the National Archives in Washington, D.C. These films were originally shown in the American theaters between September 1918 and January 1919. An interesting issue is *Official War Review* No. 9 which has a scene showing the enormous German long range guns that were put into action to shell Paris during the Spring Offensive of 1918. The intertitle asserts the American forces turned the tide of battle and saved Paris.

Apart from the American contribution to the Great War the newsreel offers views of other European armies, such as the Italian Alpine soldiers and the British Expeditionary Force in France. In addition the *Official War Review* shows some interesting scenes from Siberia where the Americans had joined an international expeditionary force to fight against Germany.

Original film from this World War I newsreel is hard to find, so we have uploaded all six issues to our YouTube channel to give you an idea how the Great War was screened in 1918-1919 in America.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:24 AM No comments:

FRIDAY, MAY 4, 2018

Filming the German Attack on Novo Georgievsk (1915)

While preparing a TV presentation on Wilbur H. Durborough's World War I film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* for C-SPAN's "Reel America" we came across an interesting newspaper story by American war correspondent Walter Niebuhr. In this report Niebuhr described how he and Durborough witnessed the German attack on the Russian forts of Novo Georgievsk at the Eastern Front.

Walter Niebuhr (1890-1946). Copied from *Motion Picture News*, 16 August 1919. Colorized picture
Link to trade paper article

Producing America's First Propaganda Films

Walter Niebuhr featured before in a previous weblog. He started his career in journalism for the Illinois *Courier Herald* and in 1915 Niebuhr was invited by the *Chicago Tribune* and the Western Newspaper Union to cover the Great War from the German side. As described in more detail in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*, Niebuhr was of special assistance to Durborough and his camera operator Ries while they were shooting film with the German army. Niebuhr spoke German fluently and often accompanied them, translating conversations with the Germans and helping them find their way through the country. When America entered the First World War, Niebuhr became Associate Director of the C.P.I. Film Division. He was responsible for producing the first official American propaganda films, such as *Pershing's Crusaders* (1918).

In August 1915, Niebuhr, Durborough and Ries left Warsaw that had just been conquered by the Germans in order to cover the siege of the Russian forts around Novo Georgievsk. The German army led by General Hans von Beseler approached Novo Georgievsk with 80,000 men including part of the powerful siege train used to capture Antwerp in 1914. The forts were surrounded on August 10 and the bombardment began a few days later. After a heavy battering the Germans attacked three of the forts and captured two of them. The Russians were forced to the inner defenses north of the river Vistula. With no prospects of being relieved and with their inner defenses vulnerable to bombardment the Russians surrendered at the dawn of August 20, 1915.

Durborough (left) and Niebuhr (right) watching German soldiers storming the forts of Novo Georgievsk. Scene from *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (USA, 1915)

Turning Point in World War I History

The fall of Novo Georgievsk was a humiliating defeat for the Russian army that had to retreat east. Poland from then on would be under German rule. The capture of these Russian forts was an important turning point in World War I and the American correspondents were on the spot to film this historic event. Here are segments from Niebuhr's report that was published in the *Fort Wayne Sentinel* on September 30, 1915:

By Walter Niebuhr.

Warsaw, Russia, Aug. 29.—(Special correspondence).—Photographer Durborough and I came from Serock, bound for the battle scene at Nowo-Georgievsk. For three hours we had been traveling from Warsaw, through shattered villages, across pontoon bridges, past miles of abandoned trenches, among clumps of torn and bleeding pines. We had now arrived at the outer edge of the chain which the Germans and Austrians were tightening around the massive fortress of Novo-Georgievsk.

As far as the eye could see from the heights of Fort Dembe lines of trenches, many of them hastily dug, wound their sinuous way across the level landscape. Wasted efforts. Most of them were never used!

Two miles from the battle line we left the automobile, which was placed under the cover of a clump of trees, and we proceeded on foot.

In the company of an officer I was permitted to crawl to the top of a hill, from where the battle could be observed from the shelter of another little dugout. Delicate white puffs, distinctly visible against the clear sky, marked the bursting of Russian grenades, directed at the German lines. Machine guns were drumming their "rat-tat-tat" with an almost monotonous constancy.

At intervals came the sonorous boom of a mortar, followed by a rolling echo from the hills beyond the river. We could see the shell explode at almost the same instant the sound reached our ears. A volcanic spray of dirt, concrete, and other debris, followed by a cloud of dust, marked the spot where the shell had found its nest.

The main citadels of Novo Georgievsk lay in the elbow made by the juncture of the Wkra and Narev rivers. Directly in front of the Wkra mouth a little island split the Narev, and upon this island stood one of the eight outer forts which guarded the main citadels. It was at this fort that German-Austrian shells were now directed.

First intermittently, then with a final desperate splurge, the guns of the island stronghold spat out their reddish flames. The complete destruction of the fort seemed but the work of moments. Soon its guns were silent, its ruins smouldered feebly, its work was done. The remainder of the garrison had jumped into steel pontoons and fled into the citadel.

It was the fifth and last of the eight outer forts to fall that day. And these strongholds had been equipped for an eight months' siege!

Movie Scene *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (USA, 1915)

On the Firing Line with the Germans has a scene showing both Durborough and Niebuhr watching a German infantry attack near Novo Georgievsk. Troops are charging across an open field while in the background shells are exploding. Niebuhr can be seen in this scene to the right of Durborough. We were able to recognize Walter Niebuhr

because of the white cap on his head. Niebuhr appeared in several scenes of Durborough's war film, and most of the time he was wearing this peculiar cap. These shots close to the German firing line must have been taken by Durborough's camera operator Ries and have a full match with the newspaper report that was written by Niebuhr.

For more information here is a link to an updated article on Durborough and the making of his World War I feature film.

Here is this scene showing the attack on the forts of Novo Georgievsk with comments by authors Cooper Graham and Jim Castellan.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:12 PM No comments:

TUESDAY, MAY 1, 2018

Close Up: The Columbia School of Military Photography (1918)

America's first school of Military Photography started during World War I at Columbia University in New York. From January 1918, still photographers and motion picture cameramen were trained for the U.S. Signal Corps that had been assigned to record America's involvement in the First World War.

Military cameramen at Columbia University (1918). Colorized picture.
Link to original high res image

Photo Collection

We recently came across an interesting photo collection on the activities at Columbia University where the campus had been transformed into a military training ground for photographers and cinematographers. These pictures were taken in 1918 by the U.S. Government for documentary and publicity purposes and are now at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. The photographs show how American cameramen were trained for the U.S. Army and provide us with an excellent coverage of all the buildings and facilities at the military school during the First World War.

We have posted before on the Columbia school of military photography during World War I in two previous weblogs:

Carl Gregory and the U.S. School of Military Cinematography

Arthur Sintzenich and the U.S. School of Military Cinematography

The pictures on the U.S. School of Military Photography at Columbia University are available for download here, including some outstanding pictures that were found by Harry Kidd.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 9:29 AM No comments:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

THURSDAY, APRIL 26, 2018

The Associated Press Covers the Great War

As described in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*, the experiences of cameramen and reporters during World War I were closely intertwined. Some US photographers wrote about their wartime experiences. Sometimes the cinematographers also worked for newspapers such as the *Chicago Tribune* or the Hearst newspapers. Cameramen and reporters were in the same bed togeher, sharing the same hardships and dangers.

American reporters at the Adlon Hotel, June 1915. Third from the right: AP correspondent S.M. Bouton. Colorized picture from *American Cinematographers in the Great War*
Link to original high res image

American cameramen and writers reporting on the Great War shared one major experience. Although as Americans they were neutral between 1914 and 1917, all reporters had to fight against a harsh and rigorous censorship both from the British and the German authorities.

"All Europe is Now in Arms"

Among these American journalists the Associated Press presents an interesting case story. "Great Britain and Germany went to war tonight," wrote the AP's Robert Collins on August 1, 1914 from London, noting that "all Europe is now in arms." The Associated Press had covered wars before, but not since the Napoleonic Wars a century earlier had so many armies battled over so great an extent.

This was the Great War, called "the European War" or "the World War" by contemporaries. Ten million combatants would die before it ended with Germany's defeat on November 11, 1918.

Here is a video on how the Associated Press reported on World War I.

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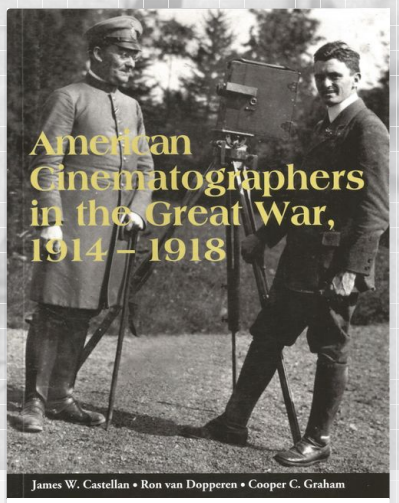

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Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:16 AM 1 comment:

THURSDAY, APRIL 19, 2018

World War I Film Lecture: "War on Three Fronts" (USA, 1916)

Researching World War I film can be a giant jigsaw puzzle. There is plenty of original footage but film scenes frequently have been edited and are now out of place. Also, when used for stock purposes or a TV documentary, the intertitles usually were cut, which makes it difficult to identify the cameraman and the original production company.

Frank Kleinschmidt getting ready for a motion picture flight above Belgrade with the Austrian airforce, 1915. Colorized picture courtesy Ruth Sarrett
Link to original high res image

Movie Lecture *War on Three Fronts* (USA, 1916)

One way to reconstruct a silent World War I movie is to consult the lecture that was used while the film was being shown on the screen. Frank E. Kleinschmidt's *War on Three Fronts* (USA, 1916) presents us with an interesting example. During our research for our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War* we were able to locate and identify many scenes from this extraordinary film because of the lecture that Kleinschmidt had deposited at the Library of Congress for copyright purposes. This lecture is dated October 23, 1916, and Kleinschmidt used it to present his war film while touring the film theaters on the West Coast. The lecture describes the original version of his war film, showing his experiences with the Austro-Hungarian army on the Eastern Front while covering the offensive in Russian Poland, as well as the attack on Belgrade, naval operations in the Adriatic Sea and fighting in the Alps against the Italian army.

Armored train at the Isonzo front, 1915. Colorized publicity picture from Kleinschmidt's film when it was released by the Selznick Corporation in 1917. Courtesy National Archives
Link to original high res image

Two reels of the movie were donated in the 1980s to the UCLA Film Archives by film preservationist David Shepard. This footage is also described by Kevin Brownlow in his classic book *The War, the West and the Wilderness*. The opening title refers to the original Part 4 of *War on Three Fronts*. A comparison between this footage and the film lecture shows there were different movie versions. While on the lecture circuit, Kleinschmidt presented about 9,000 feet of film. When the Selznick Corporation distributed the movie nationwide in 1917 it was shortened and 3,000 feet were cut out. The UCLA print has no intertitles mentioning the Selznick Corporation, so this indicates this is a pre-1917 version of *War on Three Fronts* although not identical to the one that was used by Kleinschmidt to accompany the lecture.

The Associated Press Covers the Great War
World War I Film Lecture: "War on Three Fronts" (U...
The Boy from Indiana - Albert K. Dawson
Ship Building in World War I (USA, 1918)
► March (4)
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Sound Re-release

Research by the authors in the Allen Collection and at the Library of Congress has produced additional footage from Kleinschmidt's war picture. This consists of a batch of film segments that runs for about 35 minutes, sadly missing any credits, but surprisingly enough it has a sound track. The nitrate stock found in the film archives in Culpeper, Virginia, was dated 1932. The footage comes from a film called *War Debts*, which was produced by Kleinschmidt as a sound re-release of his original war film. The movie is narrated by Wilfred Lucas, a Canadian-born American stage actor who found success in film as an actor, director, and screenwriter.

By using the film lecture we could identify the different film versions of *War on Three Fronts* which also makes it possible to do a well-deserved reconstruction of this historic and fascinating World War I film.

You are free to read and download the 1916 film lecture of *War on Three Fronts* here.

Postscript: Kleinschmidt's World War I Pictures from the Austrian Archives

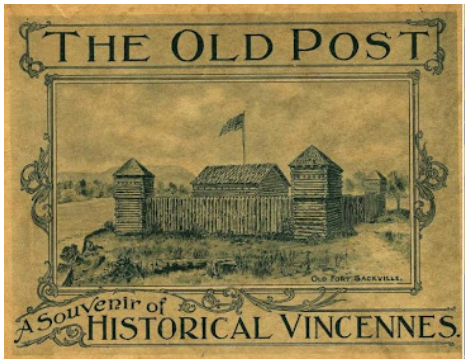
In 2019 the Austrian State Archives published a fascinating collection of Kleinschmidt's World War I pictures. These were all taken in 1915 when he accompanied the Austro-Hungarian army during the attack on the Eastern Front. We edited these photographs into this video clip. Enjoy!

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:36 AM No comments:

TUESDAY, APRIL 10, 2018

The Boy from Indiana - Albert K. Dawson

The Knox County Public Library recently digitized its historical newspaper collection. As a result, the authors found some fascinating new stories on World War I cinematographer Albert K. Dawson from Vincennes, who was nicknamed "The Boy from Indiana", including a report on how he invented a German grandmother while covering the war in Europe with his movie camera.



Albert K. Dawson, photograph from the family collection, taken around 1903. Left: Dawson's first picture book *The Old Post* on historical Vincennes.
Link to high res image (right)

Born in Vincennes, Indiana, Albert K. Dawson (1885-1967) was one of the most enterprising cameramen of the First World War. Shortly after the outbreak of the Great War he went to Europe and filmed with the German army on the Western Front. In the summer of 1915 he joined the Austro-Hungarian forces during the attack on Russian Poland. He later covered the Bulgarian army in the Balkans. Dawson's movies were released in the United States by the American Correspondent Film Company.

Family History

The local press clippings that we found shed new light on Dawson's family background. As described in more detail in our book *Shooting the Great War: Albert Dawson and the American Correspondent Film Company* (2013), Dawson's life was heavily influenced by his father Thomas who shared his son's interest in traveling. Thomas was a Civil War veteran who had been involved in 16 battles including Sherman's march through Georgia. Thomas passed away unexpectedly in 1912, when his son Albert was on a cruise in the Caribbean for the Hamburg-

America Line. At the time Albert was working as a ship's photographer for this German company. Here is a download link to an obituary of Albert's father, as well as his mother Lida who passed away in 1923.

Rose Schultheis-Dawson, photographed by her brother Albert for the cover of *The Country Gentleman* (April 1917). Courtesy Ben Walter
Link to high res image (20 Mb)

Albert also was very much fond of his sister, Rose. Like her older brother, Rose had a strong interest in history and literature, and later in her life she published on the history of her hometown Vincennes. Here is a newspaper story on Rose's marriage to Leo Schultheis in June 1915, at about the same time when Albert was filming the First World War on the Eastern Front. In addition, this story in the Knox County Public Library archives reveals how Rose, together with her husband and her mother, went to Terre Haute, Indiana, to see Albert on film in September 1915, when his war movie *The Battle and Fall of Przemyśl* was first shown on screen. They must have been impressed to see him on film, reporting at the front on the war in far away Europe.

Albert (right) and his younger brother Charlie, dressed as Civil War soldiers, around 1890. Source: www.ancestry.com

Graves of Dawson's father, mother and sister. Vincennes, Indiana
Grave of Albert Dawson and his wife Clara Hawkey. Poughkeepsie, NY

First Photographic Work

Apart from inside family information the newspaper articles contain stories on Albert's local career as a photographer. The earliest references date from 1905 when he published a picture book on the history of Vincennes - *The Old Post*. This newspaper article has more on Dawson's photo book. Also in the same year 1905, Albert published this advertisement in the local papers, offering his services as a photographer for the upcoming Thanksgiving. In September 1905, Dawson covered the Convention of the Indiana Presbytery Church in Monroe City, as mentioned in this newspaper article.

The press reports indicate Albert freelanced as a press photographer for the Vincennes newspapers throughout 1906, as is shown in this newspaper story on a criminal investigation by the local police. In 1907 he left Vincennes. These two contemporary newspaper stories indicate Dawson first went to Cuba where he spent some months doing photographic assignments, possibly for the US government. On his return from Cuba in 1908 he started working for the photographic agency of Underwood & Underwood in New York City.

The Dawson family on New Year's Day, 1902. From left to right: Charles, Lida, Albert, Thomas and Rose. Courtesy family collection, Lida Joice and Rose Ann Walter
Link to high res image

Return to Vincennes, 1916

When Dawson came back to the USA in the spring of 1916, having covered the European War on several fronts and military campaigns, his hometown Vincennes had not forgotten about him. On the contrary, by then he had become well-known as a result of his appearances in several war movies that were shown in the United States. His latest film *The Fighting Germans* had just been released by the Mutual Film Company in May 1916 and it was also shown in the Princess Theater in Vincennes, Indiana, with numerous ads running in the local newspapers, announcing this war film that had been shot by their "local boy" Albert K. Dawson.

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Marvelous films of the world war's greatest battle on the German-Russian front. This is no fake picture. Pictures presente d by the Mutual Film Corporation with the distinct guarantee that they were taken at the front under Government supervision by A. K. DAWSON, the most daring camera correspondent in the European war. Don't miss it. A real war picture. The only picture in America showing the horrors of a desperately fought battle from the very beginning to the very end.

In "The Fighting Germans" You Witness One of the Bloodiest Battles of the War

A. K. DAWSON is a local boy, born and raised in Vincennes and now on his way home from Germany. He is expected here the last of the week and if he arrives in time he will lecture this picture. This picture is bigger and better than the Battle Cry of Peace and the admission for these two days will be ten Cents.

Special matinee for the children on Saturday afternoon, so every child can see this picture. Admission for Children only 5c, Adults 10c.
This is the Only Original War Picture Being Shown in This Country

Advertisement *Vincennes Commercial*, 27 May 1916

In the summer of 1916, after having been abroad for two years, Dawson returned to Vincennes. He lectured on his experiences as a war photographer for the local Rotary - here is a press article - but the most interesting report comes from the *Vincennes Western Sun* on a lecture that he gave at Lincoln High School on July 28, 1916. The *Sun* had arranged an exclusive interview with Dawson and ran a remarkable story that day on his work as a film correspondent during World War I. In this interview Dawson proved himself right when predicting most of the upcoming battles of the Great War. Although he did not think the Central Powers would lose the war Dawson did expect a continuing stalemate on the Western Front, which would especially benefit the Germans. His admiration for the German talent of organization shines through in this article, but Dawson did emphasize he was first and foremost pro-American.

Albert Dawson, correspondent, at his desk in a war zone cottage (1915). Source: National Archives, Washington, D.C., 165-WW-418P-096

Dawson appears to have spoken German quite fluently, and while staying in Germany often was asked if he was a German-American. "At first he answered no, but seeing how he disappointed his new friends he finally invented a German grandmother by the name of Schmidt. She did him more good than any passport", Dawson said.

Here is a download link to the complete interview by the *Vincennes Western Sun*.

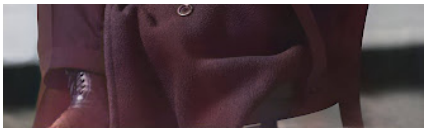
Brian Spangle recently also wrote this article for the *Sun-Commercial* on Vincennes' local hero, Albert K. Dawson.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:17 PM 1 comment:

THURSDAY, APRIL 5, 2018

Ship Building in World War I (USA, 1918)

In February 1918, the U.S. Signal Corps produced two remarkable films on the ship building industry in the United States. The footage was taken on the West Coast by Lieutenant Wilbur H. Durborough who had shot film with the German army in 1915. We recently found parts of his film in the National Archives in Washington, D.C.



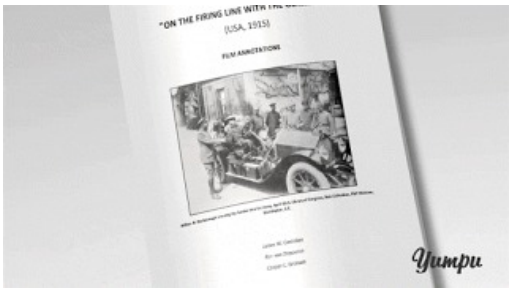
Wilbur H. Durborough (1913). Authors collection. Colorized picture.

.Link to original high res image

On the Firing Line with the Germans (USA, 1915)

Durborough's film work during World War I has been described in more detail in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*. In 1915 Durborough had gone to Europe and filmed with the German army on the Eastern Front. His film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* has been restored in 2015 by the Library of Congress, based on our film research.

We recently prepared a new, extended story on Durborough's photographic work during World War I. You can read this *Durborough Film Annotation* (2nd edition) here.



The production file at the National Archives shows Durborough made two separate movies: *Building Our Wooden Ships* (814 feet) and *Industrious Seattle* (695 feet). These short documentary films were shot in the state of Washington around the same time when he filmed a staged attack on Fort Lewis. As mentioned in a previous weblog, this film on Fort Lewis has also been retrieved by the authors in the National Archives.

Our Bridge of Ships (USA, 1918)

Unlike Durborough's film showing the staged attack on Fort Lewis not much of his original report on the shipping industry has survived. When the U.S. Signal Corps used his footage in the 1930s for the Historical Film Series on World War I most of his film didn't make it to the final cut. However, the record does show that some of his footage was used in 1918 by the Commitee on Public Information - America's wartime propaganda agency - for the film *Our Bridge of Ships*, notably scenes showing the launching of the *Ypres* at Seattle and one of the first Victory ships - *General Pershing* - at the shipyard of Olympia, Washington.

The Signal Corps file fortunately still has Durborough's original list of titles for these films. His report strongly emphasized the huge scale of America's war effort in this line of work. As an example, for the opening scene of his film on the American shipping industry he filmed a large saw mill, mentioning it would turn out more than 6,000 feet of lumber a year. Steel contracts also reportedly were booming business, totalling more than 62 million dollars. Such impressive figures clearly were used by Durborough to promote the American war industry.

Here is a download link to the complete production file of Durborough's film.

We have uploaded the final edit from the 1930s of this Signal Corps film on our YouTube channel.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:19 AM 1 comment:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 28, 2018

Motion Pictures in Military Training during World War I

The military use of motion pictures during World War I was mostly restricted to two purposes: instructing soldiers and historical documentation. Films were also used for publicity purposes but the military command did not give this idea much thought. This situation was the same in all belligerent countries, including the United States.

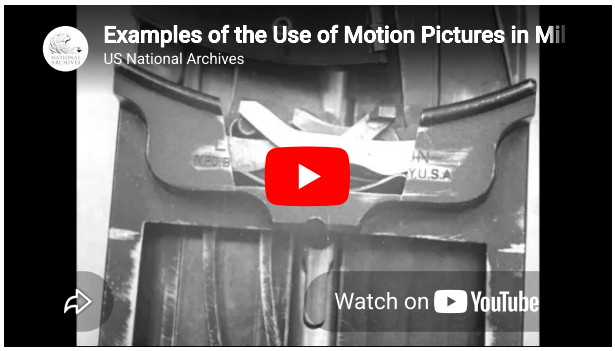
French military cinematographer, circa 1917. From the National Archives, The Hague (Holland)

An interesting example how films were used by the U.S. Army for military training comes from U.S. Signal Corps footage that was uploaded by the National Archives in January 2015 on the Internet. The footage was edited into the "Historical Series" which was compliled by the U.S. Signal Corps in 1936.

New Camera Techniques

This World War I film shows in detail the nomenclature, assembly and disassembly, and operation of a Lewis machine gun. Reel 2 shows infantry troops at Camp Meade, Maryland, lined up in various battle formations. The first reel is particularly interesting because it shows how the U.S. Signal Corps used new camera techniques such as 'stop motion capture' to demonstrate the use of the Lewis machine gun.

The military training film by the U.S. Signal Corps can be watched here.



Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:23 AM 2 comments:

TUESDAY, MARCH 20, 2018

The Creel Committee - Films in World War I

When the United States entered World War I in 1917 films became an important tool for official propaganda purposes. The organization behind these operations was the Commitee on Public Information (CPI) or the "Creel Commitee". Named after its chairman journalist George E. Creel, the CPI launched a massive publicity campaign to get America behind the Great War.

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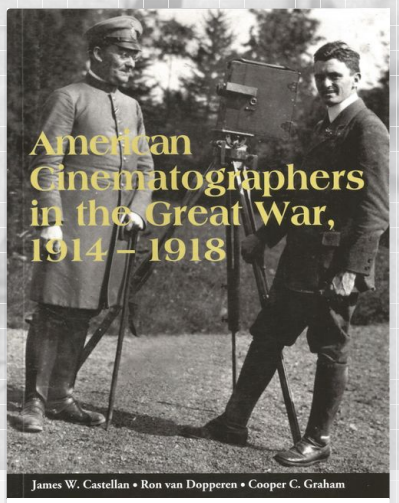

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Captured on Film by U.S. Cameramen - The Romanov Murder Scene (1918)

World War I Combat Camera Edwin F. Weigle Found!

Anatomy of an Authentic World War I Combat Scene (1915)

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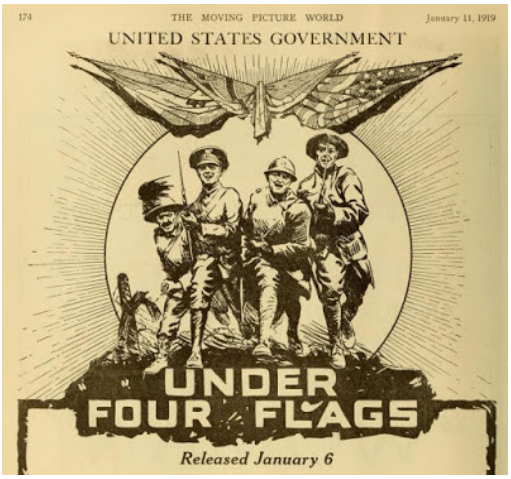
► April (4)



Advertisement *Under Four Flags* produced by the CPI. From *Moving Picture World*, 11 January 1919
Link to high res image

"The World's Greatest Adventure in Advertising"

Creel was a firm believer in the power of the media and he called his publicity campaign "The World's Greatest Adventure in Advertising". Although films were a relatively new medium at the time the CPI did not neglect the movies. America's participation in the Great War was widely shown on screen. Using official footage shot by military cameramen of the U.S. Signal Corps the CPI produced three feature documentary films, as well as numerous shorts and a newsreel, *The Official War Review*. Film stars such as Charlie Chaplin and Douglas Fairbanks were also mobilized by the CPI to urge people to buy War Bonds and enlist for the American Army.

More information on Creel's film program can be read in a chapter of our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*.

Here is a short clip uploaded to our YouTube channel on these films by the Commitee on Public Information.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:36 AM No comments:

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14, 2018

Ariel Varges Appointed with the Order of the British Empire

For his photographic work during World War I American cameraman Ariel Varges (1890-1972) was appointed an honorary member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. We recently found the official letter signed by King George V in Varges' personal collection which was put up for sale on the Internet.

▼ March (4)
Motion Pictures in Military Training during World ...
The Creel Committee - Films in World War I
Ariel Varges Appointed with the Order of the Briti...
Reporting from the Front - Robert S. Dunn
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► January (6)
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► 2016 (30)
► 2015 (37)
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Ariel Varges (1918). On the frontside Varges wrote "Sincerely yours, Ariel Varges, New York American staff"
Link to low res image

Varges featured before in this weblog. He ranked among the most prominent, pioneering film cameramen of World War I. As described in our book on the American cinematographers of the Great War, Varges worked for William Randolph Hearst and he came to Europe in December 1914. By using his close contacts with Sir Thomas Lipton, Varges got on a ship for the Serbian front and filmed the war in the Balkans. From 1916, Varges became an official cinematographer for the British Army and filmed in Greece and Mesopotamia.

Signed Photograph

The letter by King George is dated November 4, 1919. Varges apparently received this honorary appointment when he was in Paris one year later, because there is an accompanying letter dated June 26, 1920 in his personal collection, which was signed by the British Ambassador in France. The collection also has a signed photograph of Varges. The backside of this picture is dated October 1, 1918. On the frontside of the picture one of the newspapers he worked for is mentioned, the *New York American*.

The Most Excellent Order of the British Empire was established by King George V in June 1917 for services to the British Empire, rewarding contributions to the arts and sciences, work with charitable and welfare organisations and public service outside the Civil Service. In December 1918 the Order was split into two divisions: a Civil Division for civilian recipients and a Military Division to the Order for awards to be conferred on commissioned officers and warrant officers for distinguished service in action. Because of his photographic work during World War I Varges was awarded with a Military Division Order of the British Empire.

His personal collection can be seen on this website of an online auction.

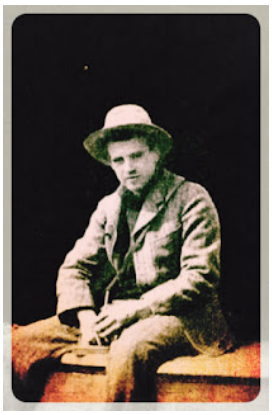
Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:33 AM No comments:

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 7, 2018

Reporting from the Front - Robert S. Dunn

Among the American journalists reporting on World War I Robert S. Dunn deserves a special note of interest. Born in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1877, Dunn was an explorer and naval officer whose interests carried him into many corners of the world. After his graduation from Harvard in 1898, he travelled the Yukon Trail to the Klondike and became a journalist upon his return.

In 1908 Dunn led the first climbing party that reached the top of Mt. Wrangell, Alaska. As a war correspondent he covered the Russo-Japanese War, the attack by the US Marines on Veracruz and General Pershing's expedition into Mexico against Pancho Villa. During World War I he was a correspondent for the *New York Post*. Dunn described his war experiences in his book *Five Fronts - On the Firing Lines with English, French, Austrian, German and Russian Troops* (1915).



Robert S. Dunn (1903)

Official Film Report

As mentioned in a previous weblog, the German government in January 1915 produced a film on the living conditions in occupied Belgium. American cameraman Albert K. Dawson and Austrian newsreel photographer Hans Theyer were assigned to accompany Dunn and a group of fellow American reporters, including Jack Reed, to make an official film. The film project was set up to show the world that the Belgian people were treated decently, thus trying to disprove the stories on atrocities committed by German soldiers in Belgium. Scenes from this movie were found by the authors while researching our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*. You can read more on this historic film in our latest book.

German frontline in the Argonne forest, photographed by Albert Dawson, January/February 1915. Colorized picture.
Link to original high res image

Albert Dawson (right), with a fellow American correspondent in Brussels, January/February 1915

Cameramen under Fire

Like Reed, Dunn mentioned the film coverage of their 1915 trench trip in his book *Five Fronts*. Here is how he described Dawson's and Theyer's frantic return from the frontline after they had just filmed a terrifying French artillery barrage near Comines:

> *Comines lies just across the old French frontier, in Belgium. We had luncheon with our generous corps' staff, in some residence all dark with ambrequins and terra cotta plaques. It was the usual officers' mess - the long table lined with mystifying uniforms, bantering one another but carefully gracious to you; boiled meats to eat, yet more of the wine of the country than beer. And that our hosts were all-Bavarian was plain from the captain on my right, who had been to Oxford, and was willing enough to admit in argument the social and economic dangers of a military hierarchy. Consider that, from a hide-bound German soldier, on the edge of battle!*
>
> *Three o'clock found us threading the narrow streets of Houthem, the divisional headquarters, and a stage nearer the inferno of the trenches. Already any windows left in the village were rattling to the detonations of shrapnel; their sudden spawning white plumes over the long rise west of the town made the woods on its crest seem alive. The place itself was shelled nearly every afternoon. A few more house size holes in its walls and roof, and the brick church de l'Assomption would be no more. We climbed the belfry, but only to see a shattered Norman church, with a rooster weathervane and a wrecked village rise from the crest of woods. Between and beyond these, the German cross-fire over the invisible French trenches yonder appeared to meet, in white spurts like two streams of cloud sped from separate air currents and waxing furious, brought out a hundering answer from the French batteries further north.*
>
> *On the ground again by the divisional station, two soldiers came down the road from that quarter carrying an elegant new coffin on their shoulders. And behind them tooted the motor-car that had taken our official cinema men [Dawson and Theyer] to the artillery up there. Exactly what had happened, the counter insinuations in the pair's stories only fogged. A shrapnel shell — or a grenade — had exploded in the air or hit the ground ten up to a hundred yards away. Somebody had dropped his [movie] machine and run, but some one else had skipped out first, while No. 2 had fled only because No. 1 wouldn't stand his ground while he had shouted to him, thought he had, et cetera. One boasted of a splash of mud hurled against his back, which was quite clean, both where he could and couldn't see it. They agreed only in their breathless resolve to hustle back to Comines, with the twenty feet of film that the first peep of sun in a week had vouchsafed them.*

In 1918 Dunn was commissioned an officer in the U.S. Navy, and served as an intelligence officer in London and in Constantinople. During his later years, he concentrated on horticulture and on writing in his home in Katonah, New York. He wrote two published novels, *Youngest World* and *Horizon Fever* and one book of verse. Dunn's autobiography was published in 1956 after his death.

Robert Dunn's book *On Five Front*s (1915) can be read and downloaded here.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:39 AM No comments:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2018

Anti-German Film Propaganda (USA, 1917-1918)

In the online collection of the National Archives in Washington, D.C. the authors recently came across a fascinating film entitled "Anti-German Propaganda" that was produced by the American government in 1917-1918.

Warning: Graphic Contents!

First a warning to anyone who would like to see this footage: the film has very graphic contents showing dead soldiers and children. It is a strong example of World War I atrocity propaganda in which the Germans are shown as the ultimate bad guys.

A.E. Wallace with the German army. Copied from the *Boston American*, 29 August 1915
Link to high res image

The American film studios during World War I produced many propaganda movies and a lot of these films are by modern standards absolutely outrageous. This film is something completely different. It isn't drama - the movie is compiled from documentary footage and still photographs. The pictures were clearly distributed to arouse antipathy toward the German war effort. Pictures show dead Germans in trenches, the Kaiser inspecting troops, dead women and children piled in a field, German troops retreating, captured Germans in a stockade, and French families inspecting their rubbled homes. Films show German troops in close-order drill, doing excercises and engaged in infantry and cavalry maneuvers, French refugees trudging along a road and Allied prisoners being guarded by German troops.

Newsreel Footage Identified

The technical quality of these pictures is outstanding. We also recognized the scenes showing the German troops in close-order drill. These were shot by American newsreel cameraman Ansel E. Wallace who went to Germany in December 1914 for the *Hearst-Selig News Pictorial*. This footage was taken in Frankfurt am Main. We found it in the Allen Collection at the Library of Congress but could not publish it because of copyright issues. This footage from the National Archives however is in the public domain and can be watched without any restrictions. Ironically, the Wallace footage of troops on the drill field at Frankfurt am Main was shot in 1915, two years before the United States got into the war. And it was made at the order of William Randolph Hearst, who was then pro-German, and with the direct blessing of the German Foreign Office -- another demonstration of how a film shot can often be exploited for almost any propaganda purpose.

You can read more on Wallace's film work during World War I in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War (2014)*.

We have uploaded this anti-German propaganda film on our YouTube channel.

Because of an age restriction imposed by Google here is the direct link to this video.

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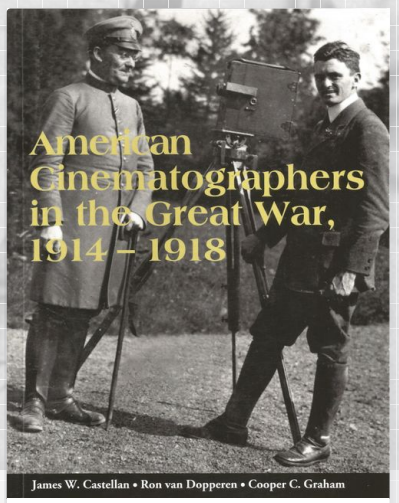

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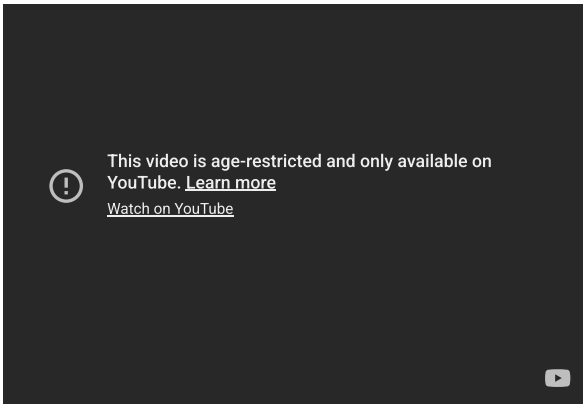

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:47 AM No comments:

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2018

"Our American Boys in the European War" (USA, 1916)

Long before the United States entered the First World War, American films capitalized on the notion of an active involvement of their country in the Great War. One of the best examples is *Our American Boys in the European War*, a four-reel film released by the Triangle Film Corporation in the summer of 1916.

This documentary film pictures the American Field Service, an organization of volunteers driving ambulances behind the French frontlines, as well as the American pilots that joined the Lafayette Escadrille on the French side of the war. Long considered a lost movie, the film has been partially retrieved. Two reels of a revamped version were found recently in the film collection of the Library of Congress. This version was released in the United States in 1917 as *Our Friend France* and has some additional scenes.

Film poster *Our American Boys in the European War* (USA, 1916)
Link to low res image

The American Field Service

For a country that was strictly speaking neutral at the time when this film was first shown, it is somewhat surprising that this movie was released. But one should not forget that when the German army closed in on Paris in 1914, many members of the American colony rallied to the French cause. Its two prime movers, former U.S. ambassador to France Robert Bacon and Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt, persuaded the French government to provide facilities for taking care of wounded French soldiers at the American Hospital at Neuilly-sur-Seine, a little suburb northwest of Paris. The next step was to set up operations for an American ambulance service, which came into effect around June 1915.

Somehow in 1916 the American Field Service managed to close a deal with the Triangle Film Corporation and with the assistance of the French authorities *Our American Boys in the European War* was produced. According to Ed and Libby Klekowksi in their excellent book *Eyewitnesses to the Great War*, the film was shot in the vicinity of Pont-à-Mousson, in the Lorraine, which was a relatively quiet frontline sector. Although the Triangle Film Corporation in some press releases claimed the company had sent its own cameramen to Europe this is highly unlikely. Most of the footage was probably made by official cinematographers of the French army, and some scenes were spliced in that were also used in other American films, notably Donald C. Thompson's *War As It Really Is* (USA, 1916).

Preparedness Movement

Our American Boys in the European War premiered in July 1916 at the Hotel Majestic in New York City. Special benefit shows for the American Field Service were arranged that summer for members of the East Coast high society at fashionable seaside resorts. The film not only was an important fund raiser for the American Field Service. It soon also became a significant propaganda instrument for the preparedness movement in America. Although the enemy was not mentioned in the speeches that accompanied the presentation of this film, it is clear the movie was used for pro-French publicity, as well as promoting a stronger national defense in the United States. As an example, the trade paper *Moving Picture World* reported the film was shown in September 1916 at the Plattsburg military training grounds in New York under the auspices of the 9th Regiment.

► March (4)
▼ February (6)
Anti-German Film Propaganda (USA, 1917-1918)
"Our American Boys in the European War" (USA, 1916)
Lost World War I Film Scenes Now Online
Movie Posters that Sold World War I to the Americans
The New York Times War Pictorial (1914-1918)
"Sinking of the Lusitania" (USA, 1918)
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Scene from *Our American Boys in the European War* (USA, 1916)

When in 1917 America entered World War I the Triangle film was shown again and soon a new version was edited, which included additional shots such as a scene showing the French General Rageneau conferring the Cross of the Legion of Honor upon A. Piatt Andrew, organizer of the American Field Service. This revamped film also has an appropriate introduction by General Joffre, commemorating French-American friendship dating back to the American Declaration of Independence. This footage must be a compilation of at least three different film versions, because there are at least three different styles of intertitles. A number of shots in the first film (about the first 20 minutes) are also scattered through the John E. Allen Collection at the Library of Congress.

Here is a copy of this 1917 version of *Our American Boys in the European War*, which can also be found on the website of the Archives of the American Field Service and AFS Intercultural Programs (AFS Archives.)

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:12 AM No comments:

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2018

Lost World War I Film Scenes Now Online

In the early days of American film history production companies frequently deposited frame enlargements at the Library of Congress for copyright application purposes. Many of these reproductions can now be accessed online and are an important source for identifying lost films.

"Bandaging the Wounded". Film scene showing Austrian Red Cross soldiers in action at the Eastern Front. From Albert K. Dawson's World War I feature film *The Battles of A Nation* (USA, 1915). Frame enlargement from the Library of Congress' Prints & Photograph Division.
Link to high res image

While researching our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War* we found a number of frame enlargements that had been deposited by the American Correspondent Film Company. The dates on the backside of the pictures, as well as the name of the production company, all pinpointed to cameraman Albert K. Dawson (1885-1967). From 1915 Dawson worked for this film company and he accompanied the German as well as the

Austro-Hungarian and the Bulgarian army in wartime Europe.

Frame Enlargements

At the time of our research these frame enlargements had not been digitized by the Library of Congress, but now the pictures can be viewed online. Dawson's pictures are in a special World War I collection named "Selected copyright deposit photos of the First World War" (Lot 880). Some of these pictures are scenes from his war films *The Battle and Fall of Przemyśl* and *Battles of A Nation* (1915). Others are regular press photographs taken by Dawson during his trench tours along the Western and the Eastern Front.

We have uploaded Dawson's pictures from this collection on our photo channel.

Postscript: Press Photograph by Dawson of POW camp Zossen

In 2019, we got hold of an original press photograph taken by Dawson in February 1915, showing how well the Germans treated prisoners of war in a camp at Zossen near Berlin. The caption was written by Dawson and emphasizes the attention given to these French prisoners of war. The picture as published here has been colorized.

Link to original high res image
Link to scan backside press photograph with caption written by Dawson

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:06 AM No comments:

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2018

Movie Posters that Sold World War I to the Americans

When the United States entered World War I a professional campaign machine was established to get the American people behind the program. Launched by America's wartime propaganda agency - the Committee on Public Information (CPI) - this publicity drive was on a scale people had never witnessed before. Posters, lobby cards and advertisements all contributed to promoting the CPI official films of the Great War.

Poster for official film presentation in Baltimore, Maryland, March 1918

Musical Artillery Barrage

The films produced by the CPI ranged from shorts to an official war newsreel and three feature documentary films: *Pershing's Crusaders*, *America's Answer* and *Under Four Flags*. All movies were boosted by a professional publicity campaign which included special screenings, direct mailings and the use of theatrical techniques to produce a stunning presentation. As an example, when in 1918 *America's Answer* premiered in New York City the curtains were raised and the stage revealed one hundred U.S. sailors singing the national anthem, followed by the theme "Over There!" which was accompanied by a breathtaking musical 'artillery barrage'. The audience when seeing and hearing all this was electrified.

For more information on the official war films by the CPI check out our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War (2014)*. Here is also a video on the American posters of World War I:

As an interesting illustration of how these official war pictures were turned into a "show" we have collected a series of film posters, lobby cards and movie advertisements which were used by the CPI throughout the United States to promote America's involvement in the Great War.

You are free to download these publicity pictures here on our photo channel.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:27 AM No comments:

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2018

The New York Times War Pictorial (1914-1918)

During World War I leading American newspapers took advantage of a new printing process that dramatically altered their ability to reproduce images. Rotogravure printing, which produced richly detailed, high quality illustrations was used to create vivid new pictorial sections. This new technique also made it possible to produce special war pictorials on an unprecedented scale.

Belgian machine gunner. Copied from the *New York Times* War Pictorial (1914)

Beginning March 29, 1914, the *New York Times* became one of six US newspapers to regularly publish rotogravure art sections as a separate section, mid-week and on Sundays. The *Times* later compiled images from these sections into a book entitled *The War of the Nations: Portfolio in Rotogravure Etchings*. This volume included images from the *New York Times* mid-week pictorials published from the start of World War I in 1914 until the signing of the Armistice in 1919.

Research Source

Most of the Sunday edition pictorials have been scanned and digitized by the Library of Congress, and prove to be

an important historical source. While researching our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War* we frequently used the *New York Times* War Pictorial section. Because many of the war photographers that we researched handled both a still and a movie camera their work also turned up in the war pictorials that were published in this newspaper.

A selection of pictures by American cameramen, published in the *New York Times* War Pictorial, is available here on our photo channel.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:02 AM No comments:

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2018

"Sinking of the Lusitania" (USA, 1918)

In 1918 American cartoonist Winsor McCay recreated the never-photographed sinking of the British liner RMS *Lusitania*. At twelve minutes it has been called the longest work of animation at the time of its release. The film is also the earliest surviving animated documentary.

Advertisement Sinking of the Lusitania, *Moving Picture World*, 24 August 1918

The sinking of the *Lusitania* by a German submarine outraged McCay, but the newspapers of his employer William Randolph Hearst downplayed the event, as Hearst was opposed to the US joining World War I. McCay was required to illustrate anti-war and anti-British editorial cartoons for Hearst's papers. In 1916, McCay rebelled against his employer and began to work on this project on his own time with his own money. It took him 22 months to complete the film.

Strong Propagandist Feel

The animation combines editorial cartooning techniques with live-action-like sequences. The intertitles emphasized that the film was a "historical record" of the event. The movie has a dark mood and strong propagandist feel. It depicts the terrifying fates of the passengers, such as the drowning of children and human chains of passengers jumping to their deaths. The artwork is highly detailed, the animation fluid and naturalistic. McCay used alternating shots to simulate the feel of a newsreel, which reinforced the film's realistic look.

There are several versions of this remarkable World War I film online. The best copy we could find was uploaded in 2015 by Tina Chancey and has an improvised musical score.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:45 AM 1 comment:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company*. James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

MONDAY, JANUARY 29, 2018

Peter Jackson's Passion for World War I Film

Lord of the Rings director, Peter Jackson, last week made international headlines when he announced a new documentary film based on a restoration of World War I footage from the collection of the Imperial War Museum.

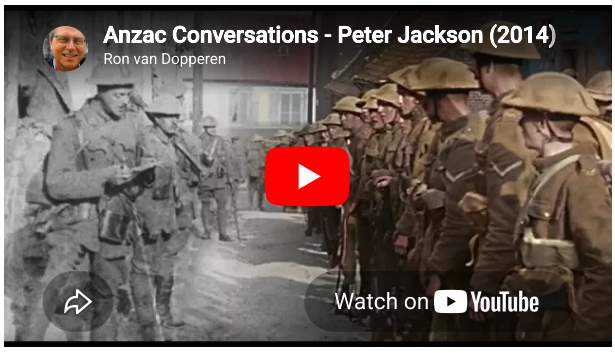
The results will be shown in cinemas, broadcast by BBC One on Armistice Day November 2018, and a copy will be sent to every secondary school in Great Britain this autumn. The footage will be accompanied by interviews with veterans, some recorded half a century ago for the acclaimed 1964 BBC series *The Great War*.

Crossing the Line (2008)

Jackson's passion for World War I film goes back to his early childhood. His grandfather was born in Britain. Jackson Sr. was a professional soldier who fought in the Great War and joined the ANZAC Expeditionary Force at Gallipoli. In 1916, he was transferred to the Western Front and went over the top at the Battle of the Somme. Peter Jackson never got to know his grandfather who passed away before he was born, but his special interest in preserving the memory of World War I has been with him for as long as he can remember. We have mentioned in an earlier weblog Jackson's work on restoring the historic footage that was taken of the ANZAC landings at Gallipoli in 1915. His passion for World War I also shines through in *Crossing the Line*, a short film produced in 2008 that was originally intended as a collection of test shots for a new type of high res digital camera. Instead Jackson produced a stunning film on war at the Western Front, as seen from the air and the trenches. Unfortunately, Jackson never released the full movie online, but here is a link to the trailer. Watching this film makes you wish he expands on this project and produces a full-blown film on the First World War. The movie is simply amazing.

In 2015 Jackson also collaborated on a World War I exhibition in Wellington, New Zealand, and who would have guessed he has a unique collection of Great War fighter planes that can actually fly? Judging from the publicity, Jackson's collaboration with the Imperial War Museum and the BBC for the upcoming documentary promises to be something quite extraordinary.

For those of you who would like to know more about Jackson's interest in World War I, here is a personal interview by a New Zealand TV channel that was broadcasted in October 2014.



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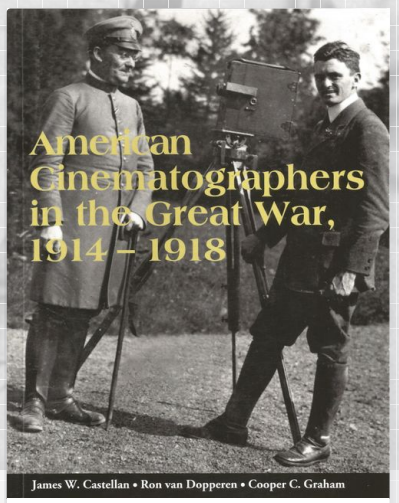

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Captured on Film by U.S. Cameramen - The Romanov Murder Scene (1918)

World War I Combat Camera Edwin F. Weigle Found!

Anatomy of an Authentic World War I Combat Scene (1915)

BLOG ARCHIVE

▼ 2018 (50)
► November (2)
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► September (7)
► August (2)
► July (4)
► June (5)
► May (6)
► April (4)

Update

On September 28, 2018, the trailer of Jackson's World War I film *They Shall Not Grow Old* was released online. The film will have its first exhibition at the British Film Institute next October and will be broadcasted later this year by the BBC.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:20 AM No comments:

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24, 2018

Ariel Varges Revisited - Filming the War in Mesopotamia (1917-1918)

American cinematographer Ariel Varges featured before in this weblog. He shot film with the Serbian and the British army during Word War I and was in a unique position to cover the military operations in Mesopotamia (Iraq) which drove the Turks out of the Middle East.

Soldiers shielding their ears during the firing of a 60 Pounder in the desert. Photograph by Varges from the collection of the Imperial War Museum
Link to low res image

In a previous weblog we described his newsreel work with the British army from 1917 when he followed the British offensive in Mesopotamia (Iraq) and covered the fall of Baghdad. Apart from newsreels Varges also produced footage for a series of topical films that were sponsored by the British War Office Cinema Commitee. The website of the Imperial War Museum lists 21 short films in this category, which all have footage that has been credited to Varges.

Scene from footage shot by Ariel Varges with the British forces in Mesopotamia

***Norton's Column* (1917)**

► March (4)
► February (6)
▼ January (6)
Peter Jackson's Passion for World War I Film
Ariel Varges Revisited - Filming the War in Mesopo...
Filming Lawrence of Arabia (USA, 1918)
World War I Cameramen Behind The Lens
"With Our Heroes on the Somme" (Germany, 1917)
Filming Field Marshal von Mackensen (1916)
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An interesting example is the short *Norton's Column in Mesopotamia*, a jumbled film of the raid into Kurdistan by Brigadier-General C.E.G. Norton's Expeditionary Force in September 1917, showing the 7th Indian Cavalry Brigade, 14th Light Armoured Motor Battery and 'S' Battery Royal Horse Artillery conducting operations towards Mandali. The footage also has a scene showing a "Turkish spy" who is brought blindfold into the British camp. The same scene appeared in the War Office *Topical Budget* newsreel no. 336-1, which was released in Britain in January 1918 and is credited to Varges.

The film collection at the Imperial War Museum demonstrates that Varges accompanied the British in August-September 1918 during a raid into Baku (Southern Russia). He also filmed a series of test shots of British generals during the campaign in Mesopotamia, notably Lieutenant-General Sir William R. Marshall, Commander in Chief of the British Expeditionary Force, filmed wearing a cap, then a sun helmet. Apart from scenes showing the British military campaign Varges also seems to have been very much interested in covering the rich cultural heritage in the country. His films have many scenes of monuments at cities such as ancient Babylon and Ctesiphon.

For a list of all of these 21 films credited to Varges at the Imperial War Museum click this link.

We have also uploaded a selection of scenes from this footage on our YouTube channel.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 12:25 PM 1 comment:

FRIDAY, JANUARY 19, 2018

Filming Lawrence of Arabia (USA, 1918)

In March 1918, American reporter Lowell Thomas turned up in Jerusalem and asked to see a young British officer whose exploits were the subject of marvelled rumour. Thomas was accompanied by Harry Chase, a seasoned photographer who also carried a motion picture camera. The meeting started the film legend of Lawrence of Arabia.

Harry Chase, shooting war in Palestine. His movie camera is a Bioscope model

Colonel T. E. Lawrence and his role in the Arab revolt is well documented. Despite of all these sources myth has taken over from history. The man responsible for this was journalist, writer, broadcaster, traveler and film producer Lowell J. Thomas (1892-1981). In April 1917, when the United States entered the Great War, the U.S. War Department asked Thomas to report on World War I under its auspices with authorization from President Wilson. He was to gather material and stories that would encourage the American people's support for the war. With the financial backup by a group of business men from Chicago Thomas purchased the contract of crack cameraman Harry Chase, formed a company called *Thomas Travelogues*, got married, and set off for Europe with his new bride, Frances, and his cameraman to cover the war.

T. E. Lawrence (left) and Lowell Thomas in Aqaba, 1918

Upon arrival in France, Thomas soon discovered that the slaughter, the mud and the trenches at the Western Front were hardly suitable for a promotional campaign. So, he went to Palestine where the British forces had just conquered Jerusalem from the Turks, and this was where he met T. E. Lawrence. It should be noted that Thomas and Chase only met Lawrence briefly. Lawrence saw that Thomas' mission could be used to help promote the little-known Arab revolt. But he wished to keep Thomas at arms' length to protect his much-valued privacy. This is borne out in the photographic and cinematographic record. Lawrence permitted Chase to take a number of photographs of himself in Arab dress, both in Jerusalem and outside his tent in Aqaba. But Thomas only spent a couple of days close to Lawrence and never accompanied Lawrence on his campaigns. The film record also bears this out.

With Lawrence in Arabia (USA, 1927)

It was only after the Great War in 1919 when Thomas was showing his series of five films on the war that - much to his own surprise - he noticed the public interest was building up and more people wanted to see this strange, young British officer dressed in Arab oufit. In order to secure enough pictures Thomas organized a second photo shoot in London together with Lawrence. Then, after the publication of his book on Lawrence and the Arab revolt, Thomas edited his travelogue footage into the film *With Lawrence in Arabia* that was released in 1927. By then, the legend of Lawrence of Arabia had been fully established.

As an interesting sideline, in December 1934 Lowell Thomas hosted a radio show in New York City and a special guest for this show was Albert K. Dawson. Like Thomas, Dawson had been a film correspondent during World War I. He shot movies in 1915-1916 with the German, the Austro-Hungarian and the Bulgarian army. Dawson was working in the tourist business then, and after the Second World War corresponded with Thomas. Here is one of his letters to Thomas. More information on Dawson can be found in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*.

A complete and original version of *With Lawrence in Arabia* (USA, 1927) is hard to find online. The Imperial War Museum has quite some scenes from this movie, running just over 15 minutes, as well as a collection of unsorted footage. We have uploaded segments from Thomas's original movie, taken from the Imperial War Museum, together with a short introduction on how T. E. Lawrence was filmed, on our YouTube channel.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 12:25 PM 2 comments:

TUESDAY, JANUARY 16, 2018

World War I Cameramen Behind The Lens

While researching our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*, we came across an interesting collection of pictures from the collection of the National Archives in Washington, D.C. These are all from the records of the U.S. Signal Corps that was assigned to film and photograph America's involvement in the Great War.

U.S. Signal Corps crew filming American troops arriving in a village in Lorraine, France (1918). Colorized picture.
Link to original high res image

Quite a number of these photographs show the U.S. Signal Corps cameramen at work on the Western Front in 1918. Thanks to research by Harry Kidd at the National Archives these pictures have been scanned and uploaded on the internet. Finally, after almost one hundred years, we can see how these official war pictures were made.

A team of U.S. Signal Corps photographers train on an early 35mm film camera in preparation of being shipped overseas in 1918. Both men are wearing standard U.S. uniforms and both are armed with their Model 1911 revolver. Source: National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Link to low res image

For a sample of these photographs here is a weblog showing the activities of these World War I photographers.

Weblog: Behind the Camera Lens - World War I Photographers

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:43 AM No comments:

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 10, 2018

"With Our Heroes on the Somme" (Germany, 1917)

In January 1917, the Bild- und Film Amt (BuFA) released *Bei Unseren Helden an der Somme*. Proclaimed by the Germans as a depiction of "the German will in war", the film was supposed to counteract the enormous success of the British film *Battle of the Somme*.

Movie poster for *Bei Unseren Helden an der Somme* (1917)

Link to low res image

When this war documentary was shown on the screen the German authorities realized they were about to lose the propaganda war with the British. In the early years of the war the use of film for wartime publicity had been limited. As we described in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*, it took a lot of initiative for American cameramen to cut through military red tape and censorship and make movies with the German army. The effect of *The Battle of the Somme*, both at home and in neutral countries, changed all of this and it must have contributed substantially to the decision by the German government to intensify official film propaganda and set up the Bild- und Film Amt.

Bei unseren Helden an der Somme was BuFA's first attempt at a feature length propaganda film and was largely unsuccessful in comparison to the British film. The film's lack of success was due mainly to the strict censorship by the military authorities, which resulted in the absence of combat footage. Rather than sending cameramen to the front when audiences demanded this footage, the Germans created it using a combination of scenes staged in training areas and footage from previous wars.

Staging the Battle of the Somme

When the decision was made to produce a German film on the Battle of the Somme a problem first had to be solved: the Germans had not covered this campaign on film. Accordingly, although the first part of the film has some authentic footage, both the second and third parts were reconstructed to "show" what happened on the Somme front. These segments were compiled from films showing military trainings and previous conflicts. A forest - supposed to be at Saint-Pierre Vaast and an important fighting ground during this campaign - turns out to be completely free from damage. There are also inconsistencies in the type of helmet worn by German soldiers. Both the pickle and the steel helmet, which replaced the pickle in 1916, appear throughout the film.

Yet the German press campaign that accompanied the film dwelled on the film's excellence. *With Our Heroes on the Somme* was presented as a documentary, but the gap between authentic and staged scenes was too big to allow for long-term success. The Somme movie however was instrumental in setting up German propaganda strategy during the Second World War, which was aimed at total media control.

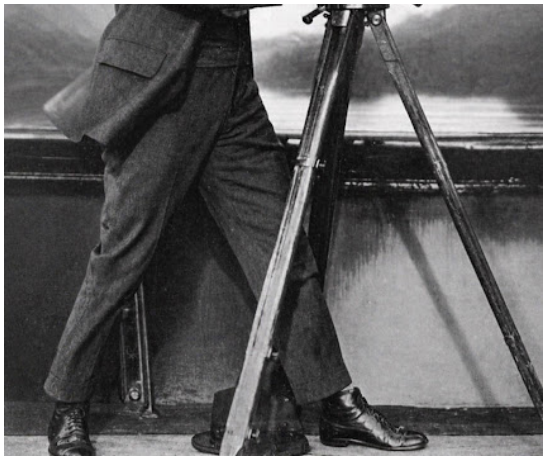
A copy of this official war film from the collection of the German Federal Archives has been uploaded on our YouTube channel.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:56 AM No comments:

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 3, 2018

Filming Field Marshal von Mackensen (1916)

In March 1916, Field Marshal August von Mackensen visited the Turkish capital Constantinopel. Von Mackensen was sent from Berlin as Kaiser Wilhelm's emissary to pay his regards to the Turkish Sultan and strenghten the military alliance with the Ottoman Empire. Mackensen - one of the best field commanders of the German army during the First World War - was filmed during this occasion. The historic footage is from the German Federal Archives and was probably taken by American cinematographer Nelson E. Edwards.



Nelson Edwards, circa 1914. Copied from the *Baltimore Sun*, 1944
Link to newspaper article

European Film Gateway

The film report was uploaded by the German Federal Archives to the webportal European Film Gateway in November 2014, as part of a program to digitize contemporary films of the Great War by all of the major European film archives. The film was exhibited in 1916 in German movie theaters as part of the weekly *Messter* newsreel. The cinematographer however probably wasn't German, but he was an American newsreel cameraman, Nelson Edwards.

Field Marshal von Mackensen, inspecting Turkish soldiers. Scene from *Messter Woche* newsreel (1916)

Edwards' experiences as a film cameraman in Europe have been described in more detail in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*. He was sent to Turkey by the Germans in early 1916 to publicize the recent defeat of Serbia by the Central Powers, as well as the resulting celebration of German-Turkish amity. Edwards filmed von Mackensen on his arrival in Constantinopel and covered his visit to Turkey closely. Edwards was quite taken with von Mackensen, a man he described as "a fierce, swift fighter, a brilliant strategist, a doer always of the unexpected."

The scenes that were shot by Edwards were shown in the Hearst newsreels in the United States in June 1916. On his return to Germany Edwards agreed to let *Messter Woche* newsreel use his footage by a letter dated 20 April 1916. And so these scenes were also exhibited in Germany, which explains how we found his film report of von Mackensen's visit in a contemporary German newsreel by *Messter.*

We have uploaded this film report from the *Messter* newsreel on our YouTube channel.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:48 AM No comments:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2017

Reaching the Masses - Propaganda Film During World War I

Hosted by Indy Neidell, YouTube channel *The Great War* shows you the history of the First World War in the four years from 1914 to 1918, exactly 100 years ago. In September 2016 a special episode was broadcasted on film propaganda during World War I.

Film poster *Over the Top* (USA, Vitagraph 1918)

Cinemas were already pretty popular when World War I broke out in 1914. After initial hesitation all warring nations started to embrace the new mass medium for their propaganda. The episode shows that, since it was technically difficult to deliver the authentic material the audiences wanted, war films were frequently staged. Film scripts opened the opportunity to transport any message about the war to a mass audience.

You can subscribe to this interesting show and watch a new video every Monday, Thursday and Saturday.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 10:15 AM 1 comment:

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2017

War Reporters on the Eastern Front (1915)

In June 1915, Dutch journalist Marcus van Blankenstein left Berlin and visited the Eastern Front. A correspondent for the *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, Van Blankenstein witnessed the destruction in Eastern Prussia as a result of the invasion of the Russian army. The report that he filed on this trench trip is also interesting for film history because in this story he mentions an American cinematographer and the way he worked while filming the war.

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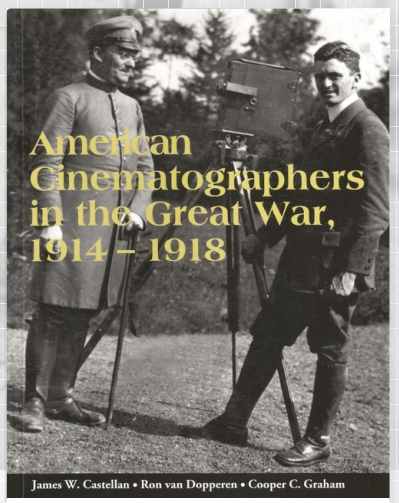

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World War I Combat Camera Edwin F. Weigle Found!

Anatomy of an Authentic World War I Combat Scene (1915)

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► 2018 (50)
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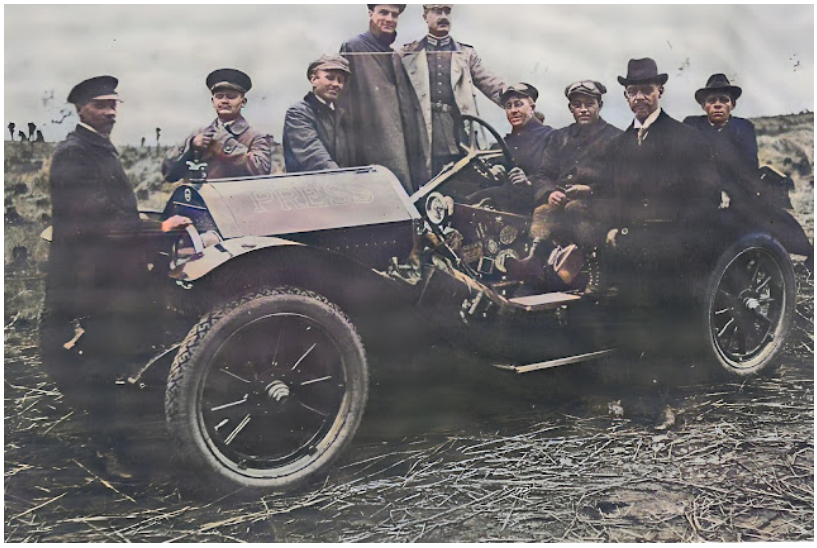
Reaching the Masses - Propaganda Film During World...
War Reporters on the Eastern Front (1915)
Mobilizing Movies! The U.S. Signal Corps Goes to W...
► November (4)



War reporters at the Eastern Front. Durborough is at the wheel of the car. Colorized photograph, courtesy William G. Chrystal
Link to original high res image

Although he doesn't mention any name, by checking the details on Van Blankenstein's trip it is clear that the cinematographer was Wilbur H. Durborough, the flamboyant American reporter who accompanied the German army together with his camera operator Irving Guy Ries. Durborough has been mentioned before several times in this weblog, as well as in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*.

Durborough With
BIG GERMAN DRIVE
AT RUSSIA!

Heavy line shows route taken by Staff Photographer Durborough in his latest camera campaign i the eastern war zone.

Staff Photographer W. H. Durborough, who went to Germany in the spring to take pictures for this newspaper, IS WITH THE GERMANS IN THEIR GREAT DRIVE against Russia from East Prussia.

A batch of films has just arrived from him, showing scenes behind the firing line of Gen. von Hindenburg and of Gen. von Buelow, who is pushing down into Russia with the greatest army of cavalry ever gotten together. Durborough's journey by automobile started at Posen in Germany and his motor carried him northeasterly through East Prussia to Koenigsberg, through the famous Manzurian Lakes district and down into Russia itself.

The Beacon will print Durborough's most interesting pictures from day to day.

Durborough's first trip through East Prussia, copied from the *Wichita Beacon*, 9 August 1915
Link to high res image

"Band of brothers"

At the moment described by Van Blankenstein Ries evidently was at another place and Durborough himself cranked the movie camera. According to this Dutch reporter, Durborough staged some of his film scenes, such as a group of Russian prisoners of war who were asked by him to perform a colorful folkore dance. "With all pleasure I would make a band of brothers out of them and join them into battle!", Durborough exclaimed after he had seen their performance. Van Blankenstein clearly didn't approve of his journalistic methods. "It is so typical for these American business men. To these people this whole war apparently is nothing more than a chance to make a big movie drama out of it. A spectacle that they can watch and enjoy from a professional point of view."

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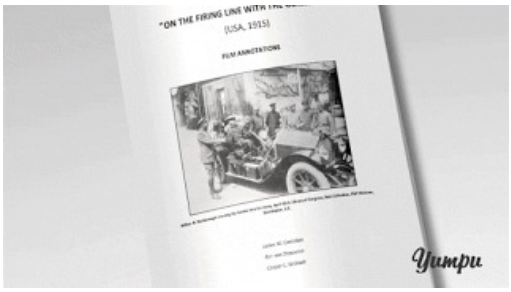
Van Blankenstein's original press report can be read here.

For more information on Durborough's photographic work during World War I here is a link to an extended edition on the making of his film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (USA, 1915)



Postscript

In October 2019, ARTE TV broadcasted this episode of "Mysteries in the Archives" on American film correspondent Wilbur Durborough and the making of his World War I film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (USA, 1915)

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:34 AM No comments:

MONDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2017

Mobilizing Movies! The U.S. Signal Corps Goes to War, 1917-1919

To mark the centennial of the First World War an international conference was organized recently on the birth of military cinematography. Authors Cooper Graham and Ron van Dopperen for this occasion were asked to prepare a presentation on the film program by the U.S. Signal Corps during World War I.

Lieutenant Ira P. Gillette, photographic officer of the 1st Division, A.E.F., in France, April 1918. Colorized Signal Corps photograph, courtesy Harry B. Kidd

Link to original high res image

The conference *The Birth of Military Cinemas* was organized in Namur, Belgium, on November 30 and December 1 by the Royal Belgian Film Archives, in cooperation with ECPAD, the Mission Centenaire 14-18 France and the Universities of Namur and Picardie. With contributions by leading film historians representing most of the European countries that were belligerents during the Great War our presentation focused on the official military cinematographers that accompanied the American Expeditionary Force in France, how these men were trained, improvements in camera technique, the conditions at the front while filming the Great War and the uneasy relationship between the U.S. Signal Corps that was officialy assigned to cover the war and the Committee on Public Information (CPI), America's wartime propaganda agency.

Powerhouse

As demonstrated in our presentation, the work done by these military cameramen from the United States improved significantly as a result of the CPI film efforts. At the time of the Armistice in November 1918, the Photographic Unit of the U.S. Signal Corps had become a remarkable powerhouse, with seven photographic field units on duty in the combat zone on the Western Front. At the National Archives in Washington, D.C., there is also a huge amount of footage available that was shot by these cameramen. The American film legacy of the Great War is impressive.

Based on our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*, we did additional research for this presentation on the Signal Corps films of World War I. We edited the results into a film presentation and showed this short documentary for the first time during the conference on December 1. Enjoy this web launch!

Here is a link to the conference paper that we submitted on the birth of military cinematography in the United States during World War I.

Postscript

In 2023, all contributions to this conference in Namur were published in French in this publication *Naissance des cinémas militaires (1914-1939)*

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 12:29 AM 1 comment:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2017

Shooting the Desert War in Iraq, 1917-1918

In January 1917, American cinematographer Ariel Varges accompanied the British army to cover the desert war in Mesopotamia (Iraq). Advancing on both sides of the Tigris river, forcing the Ottoman army out of a number of fortified positions along the way, the British on March 11, 1917, entered Baghdad where they were greeted as liberators.

Captain Varges, the official cinematographer, in a forward post near Ramadi, 1917. Photograph from the collection of the Imperial War Museum. IWM Q 24232. Colourised by Doug and published on Facebook

Varges' film work during World War I has been described in more detail in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*. As mentioned in a previous weblog, as a result of a new resource website on the history of British newsreels we are now able to pinpoint Varges' film work with the British, starting with his coverage of the Great War at Salonika, Greece, right down to the desert war in the Middle East. Commissioned as a Captain in the British Army, Varges was in a unique position to cover the First World War with his movie camera.

"With the British in Baghdad"

The newsreels shot by Varges were released by the British War Office and appeared in the *Official Topical Budget* series that was shown twice a week in British theaters. The footage was probably syndicated to other newsreels both in Europe and in the U.S.A. Based on the records available, Varges is credited as cinematographer for 13 newsreel scenes showing the desert war between the British and the Turks in 1917-1918. He was in Baghdad around the time when the city was captured and his first newsreel contribution "With the British in Baghdad" appeared in *Topical Budget* No. 323-2, that was released on November 3, 1917. Varges' newsreel coverage shows that he followed the military campaign quite closely.

Battle of Ramadi

In September 1917, Varges covered the second Battle of Ramadi. With artillery support, British forces advanced up two ridges to the south of Ramadi in the face of Turkish machine gun, rifle and artillery fire. Both were taken by the early afternoon of September 28, 1917. The Turkish surrender came just in time, as a powerful sandstorm began shortly afterwards which reduced visibility to a few metres. Had it struck earlier, the garrison could easily have slipped away. The British were now able to drive the Turks completely out of Mesopotamia. The capture of Ramadi also led to the local Arab tribes switching sides and supporting the British.

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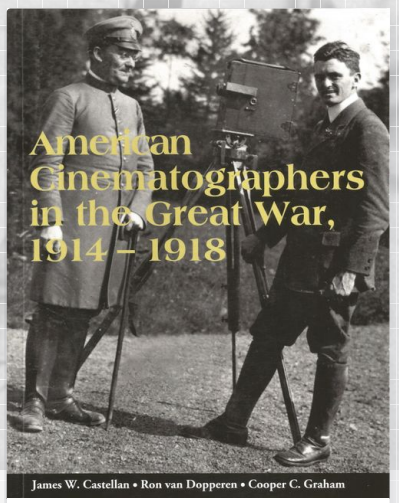

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World War I Combat Camera Edwin F. Weigle Found!

Anatomy of an Authentic World War I Combat Scene (1915)

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Shooting the Desert War in Iraq, 1917-1918
Filming an Attack on Fort Lewis, Washington (USA, ...
Lost and Found: Filming Nobel Prize Winner Alexis ...
Close Up: "The Battle and Fall of Przemyśl" (USA,

British officers interrogating a very young boy soldier in the desert. Photograph by Varges. Courtesy Imperial War Museum

Although a number of remarkable photographs by Varges have survived on this battle the newsreel references available do not mention any movie scenes taken by him at Ramadi. He did cover the Camel Corps during its operations in the Iraqi desert, and filmed French as well as Indian troops in action. The extant footage also has an interesting scene showing a spy who got caught by the British.

Varges spent the final months of the war around Baghdad taking pictures of daily life in the city. A letter from his personal collection that was sold recently on eBay indicates that he was hospitalized in December 1918. This letter was written from the "Officers Hospital" in Baghdad. Apparently Varges became ill with fever while being evacuated from Iraq and was gravely ill for several weeks. In this letter to his mother, Varges describes how he was "shell shocked" during an attack. In March 1919, Varges returned to the United States and was discharged from the British army. He remained a globetrotting war photographer for the Hearst newsreels until shortly before his retirement around 1952.

Captured camouflaged Turkish guns in action against the enemy. Photograph by Varges, from the collection of the Imperial War Museum

Out of 13 newsreel scenes credited to Varges on the British desert war we were able to identify 4 scenes in the film collection of the Imperial War Museum. Apart from regular newsreel footage, the Imperial War Museum has much more film shot by Varges while he accompanied the British army in Mesopotamia (Iraq). We will return to this subject in another weblog.

The newsreel scenes shot by Varges on the British desert war have been uploaded on our YouTube channel.

Click this link for a complete list of all references to Ariel Varges and his films for the British during World War I.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:24 AM 3 comments:

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2017

Filming an Attack on Fort Lewis, Washington (USA, 1918)

In the National Archives the authors recently found a fascinating film that was shot in 1918 by Wilbur H. Durborough for the U.S. Signal Corps, showing a staged attack on Fort Lewis in Washington.

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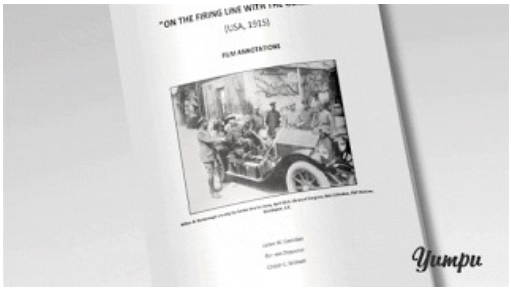
Wilbur H. Durborough in Signal Corps office, Washington, D.C., January 1919. Colorized picture.

Link to original high res image

On the Firing Line with the Germans (USA, 1915)

Durborough's film work during World War I has been described in more detail in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*. In 1915 he and his camera operator Ries went to Europe and filmed with the German army on the Eastern Front. Their film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* has been restored in 2015 by the Library of Congress, based on our film research. This previous weblog has a link to a TV show by *American History TV* with commentary by authors Cooper Graham and Jim Castellan on this film project.

We recently prepared a new, extended story on Durborough's photographic work during World War I. You can read this *Durborough Film Annotation* (2nd edition) here.



In November 1917 Durborough accepted a commission as a Lieutenant in the U.S. Signal Corps which had been assigned to cover the American intervention into the war. During his time in military service, Durborough produced a short film at Fort Lewis, Washington, to demonstrate how the troops there would defend against an attack. This clearly wasn't a training film but intended to show the United States Army was well prepared for war. According to a contemporary report in the *Seattle Star*, Durborough's film was released through the Commitee on Public Information - America's wartime propaganda agency - to the state councils for defense for public exhibition.

As he did in his 1915 film, Durborough followed a story line. Initially troops are seen relaxing until the alert comes via semaphore and phone, then troops are mustered and deployed, followed by escalating displays of camouflaged infantry and artillery counterattack and concluding with evacuating and treating the wounded. Durborough appears to have believed it important for war film credibility to include casualties, real or staged. His film also emphasized how soldiers felt at home in camp, with scenes showing visits by their family and loved ones.

Scene from *The Western Spirit* (USA, 1918)

Original Film Script Found

We were extremely fortunate in having found Durborough's original script "The Western Spirit" for this short film.

His personal script, as well as the footage, was filed by the Signal Corps in 1936 as part of their Historical Film Series on World War I under the title *Training at Camp Lewis, Washington* (NARA, RG 11-H-1245).

Here is a download link to the complete production file on Durborough's film.

The Signal Corps documents not only have Durborough's list of titles for this film project, but also a revised list that was used for the final edit in 1918. The file shows that Durborough's input was used for almost all of his film. Contemporary press reports mention Durborough made this movie together with press photographer Edward N. Jackson who worked for the *New York Daily News* after World War I. But the Signal Corps film file does not credit Jackson, so it seems likely he only did still photography for this project.

By using Durborough's list we could identify almost all scenes in this short film and reconstruct the original movie.

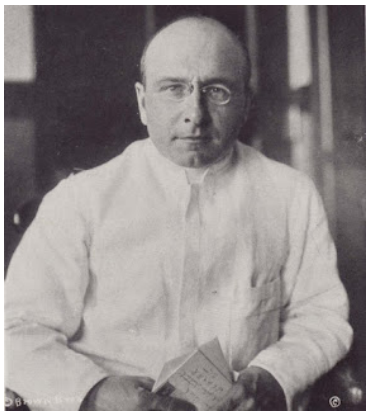
We have uploaded Durborough's reconstructed film on the attack on Fort Lewis on our YouTube channel and have added contemporary World War I music to this clip. Enjoy!

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:01 AM No comments:

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2017

Lost and Found: Filming Nobel Prize Winner Alexis Carrel (1916)

On August 31, 1916, American cameraman Merl LaVoy was just behind the frontlines in a hospital at Compiègne. There he filmed Nobel Prize winner Alexis Carrel, the man who invented vascular surgery and performed the first heart bypass operation as well as the first heart transplant. Together with the famous aviator Charles Lindbergh Carrel also laid the groundwork for the artificial heart.



Alexis Carrel (1873-1944). Picture taken in World War I

The authors recently found a letter by LaVoy in the archives of the French Academy of Medicine which sheds some new light on how he captured Carrel with his movie camera. Carrel played an important part in the history of World War I. During the First World War Carrel and the English chemist Henry Dakin developed a special method of treating wounds based on chlorine which, preceding the development of antibiotics, was a major advance in the care of traumatic wounds.

Breakthrough

The Dakin-Carrel method was an absolute breakthrough in medical treatment during World War I. Deaths as a result of gangrene were reduced significantly as a result of this discovery. Strangely enough, when LaVoy visited Carrel in the summer of 1916 he gave him most of the credits. Although Dakin had invented the antisceptic chemical that was actually used he hardly was mentioned in LaVoy's film. The truth of the matter was: Dakin was a shy and retiring person who was reluctant to speak in public. Carrel on the other hand was quite a different man.

He was a short Napoleonic figure and in his photographs looks like an arrogant prelate of medical science.

As a result, it was Carrel who cashed in on most of the publicity. Headlines in the *New York Times* soon blazed: “Drs. Carrel and Dakin find new antiseptic. Remedy said to make infection impossible.” Certainly the technique and the solution were used all over the world and saved thousands of lives, with Carrel largely taking credit for Dakin’s discovery. After the war Carrel came home to a hero’s welcome. For this Carrel was even awarded the French *Légion d'honneur*.

Heroic France (USA, 1917)

In a previous weblog we mentioned how we found footage from Merl LaVoy's first film project *Heroic France* (USA, 1917). Among the scenes that we found are a number of close ups showing Carrel which were taken at his hospital in Compiègne. Shortly after recording these films LaVoy corresponded with Carrel on these movie scenes. The letters show there was a considerable interest in LaVoy's film work. At the request of Carrel's colleagues he sent them duplicates of his films which were greatly appreciated.

You can read and download LaVoy's and Carrel's war letters here. Courtesy: Bibliothèque de l'Académie nationale de médecine (Paris).

Here is LaVoy's war film *Heroic France* which was posted before on our YouTube channel. The scenes showing Alexis Carrel can be watched at 3: 17 minutes.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:55 AM No comments:

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2017

Close Up: "The Battle and Fall of Przemyśl" (USA, 1915)

In the spring of 1915, American cameraman Albert K. Dawson followed the attack by the Austro-Hungarian army on the Eastern Front. The target was Przemyśl, a heavily fortified city that had been taken by the Russians earlier that year. Segments of Dawson's war film *The Battle and Fall of Przemyśl* - long considered lost - were recently found by the authors in the Austrian film archives.

The effect of the bombardment of Przemyśl. Note the copright reference to Dawson. The same scene also appeared in his war film. Colorized photograph.
Link to high res image

Film Sources

While researching our book on the American cinematographers in the Great War we came across various film fragments that were shot by Dawson during this offensive. Apart from footage at the Library of Congress the Imperial War Museum also has scenes from this film. The film in London turned out to be a copy of a movie with Hungarian intertitles. The frame enlargements that we found, as well as the lecture that was used for the exhibition of the film in the U.S.A, all pinpoint to Dawson who as a neutral American film correspondent appears to have done most of the principal cinematography for this movie.

Opening scenes from film clip

The most complete sequence comes from footage which is now at the Austrian Film Museum in Vienna. Running 14 minutes, the film starts with the Austrian artillery bombarding the forts of Przemyśl. In the next scene we see Dawson walking on the battlefield, together with an Austrian soldier. He is also seen inspecting the artillery that had been taken from the Russians. The film ends with a celebration of the capture of the city which took place on June 3, 1915.

Original movie poster "Battle and Fall of Przemyśl" (USA, 1915)

Link to low res image

Interview with *Continental Times*

Shortly after his return from the Eastern Front, Dawson was interviewed on his experiences as a war photographer by the *Continental Times*. Here is a download link to this article.

To recontruct the original look and feel of this war film from 1915 as released in the USA we translated the Hungarian intertitles into English and added contemporary Austrian military music to these film segments.

For some interesting backgrond information, here is a download link to a publicity leaflet of this World War I film, which was used during an exhibition in November 1915.

You can read more on Dawson's film adventures during World War I in our book *Shooting the Great War: Albert Dawson and the American Correspondent Film Company (2013)*

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:48 AM 3 comments:

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Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2017

Filming America's First War with Russia (1918-1919)

In November 1918 a photographic unit of the U.S. Signal Corps arrived in Siberia to cover Operation "Polar Bear", the American intervention in Russia. At the end of World War I the United States had sent two forces to Russia. The 339th Infantry Regiment was sent to Archangel and Murmansk near the Arctic Circle, initially to protect supplies and help reopen a second front against Germany. The 27th and 31st Infantry were sent to the Vladivostok region, to assist Czechoslovak military units trying to make their way to the western front.

Left: Captain Howard Price Kingsmore, U.S. Signal Corps photographic officer with his camera at the North-Ural front in Siberia. Right: Signal Corps cameraman taking pictures on a railcar on the Transsiberian Railroad. Signal Corps Collection, National Archives
Link to low res image left

The experience in Siberia for the American soldiers was miserable. Problems with fuel, ammunition, supplies and food were widespread. Horses accustomed to temperate climates were unable to function in sub-zero Russia. Water-cooled machine guns froze and became useless. During their time in North Russia from 1918 until 1920 the American forces suffered more than 210 casualties. In fact, America's first war with Russia turned out to be a dismal failure. At least 5,000 U.S. troops were sent into Russia to kill Bolsheviks, but after the Armistice most of the soldiers just wanted to go home. Early in 1919, instances of rumored and actual mutinies became frequent. As a result, President Wilson directed his War Department to begin planning a withdrawal from North Russia.

American troops landing in Russia. Scene from Signal Corps footage at National Archives

Film Release by National Archives

U.S. Signal Corps cameramen recorded America's first war with Russia and produced 1,200 still photographs as well as 12,000 feet of motion picture film. The films were filed at the National Archives in College Park, MD, and until recently only a few scenes of this strange war were made available to the public. This all changed when in December 2014 the National Archives uploaded 14 reels of footage on the Internet, showing the activities of the American Expeditionary Force in Siberia.

Here are these films as uploaded by the National Archives on YouTube.

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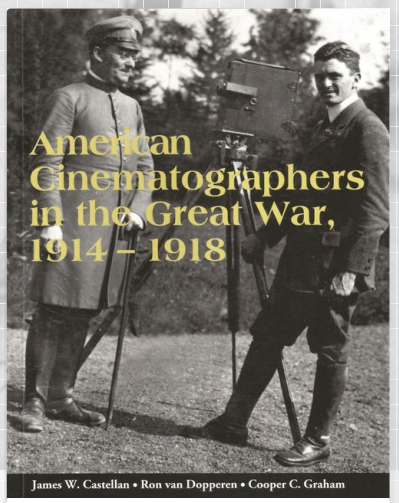

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Filming America's First War with Russia (1918-1919)
The First Home Movies of World War I
The Strange Case of Dr. Lewis H. Marks

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:29 AM No comments:

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2017

The First Home Movies of World War I

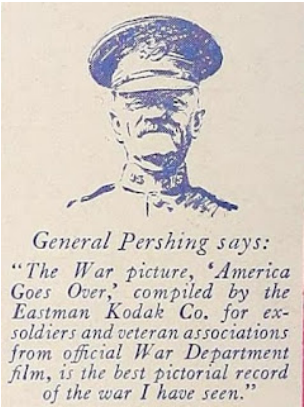
On October 8, 1927, the Eastman Kodak Company presented what was announced as "the only picture record of America's part in the World War officially released for home projection." For the first time in film history, the audience could watch actual scenes from the battlefields of France in their own living room.

Advertisement for the Kodak World War I home movies. From *Amateur Movie Maker*, November 1927

These first home movies of the Great War were available for $150. The footage was on 16 mm, a revolutionary new format Eastman Kodak had introduced in 1923 as a less expensive amateur alternative to 35 mm film. Sixteen mm film was one of the first formats to use acetate safety film as a film base. Kodak never used nitrate film for this format because of its high flammability. In addition to making home movies, people could buy or rent films from the Kodak film library, a key selling point. Amateur film makers could buy a complete 16 mm outfit from Kodak consisting of a camera, projector, tripod, screen and splicer for $335.

America Goes Over

The disillusionment that followed shortly after the Peace Treaty of Versailles resulted in few war films in America during the 1920s. There were some blockbusters to be sure, notably *The Big Parade* (1925) and *Wings* (1927). But these were fiction. Documentary war films for a wide audience were not considered commercially viable. This changed somewhat with the introduction of home movies in the United States. A new market was opened and footage that had been shown in the regular theaters could now be released again to interested customers such as veterans of the Great War. The Kodak series on World War I was taken from *America Goes Over* (1918), a production of the Committee on Public Information (CPI), America's wartime propaganda agency. Rereleased on 16 mm Kodak Cinegraph format, the customer could order the full series of five episodes or buy a single film.



We found "Flashes of Action", one of Kodak's first home films of World War I, in the Periscope Films collection and have uploaded it on our YouTube channel.

The original 1918 CPI production *America Goes Over* can be watched here.

World War I Combat Camera Edwin F. Weigle Found!

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Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:19 AM 1 comment:

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2017

The Strange Case of Dr. Lewis H. Marks

A conspicuous figure behind the scenes in Germany during World War I was Dr. Lewis H. Marks. More than just a regular research chemist doing business in Berlin, Marks was also a secret agent for the German government, spying on American reporters.

Lewis H. Marks. Colorized press photo from 1933 when he became President of the Continental Distilling Corporation in Philadelphia. Authors collection.

Born in New Orleans in 1883, Lewis Marks studied medicine and came to Frankfurt am Main, Germany, in 1907 where he became an assistant to the famous Dr. Paul Ehrlich, the man who discovered the cure for syphilis. Apart from selling serums to the German army during the First World War Marks also used his extensive contacts with the German government to assist American journalists, helping them with an interview or a permit to get to the front. This way he gained the trust of these American reporters who even made him an honorary member of their correspondents club at the Adlon Hotel in Berlin. But they didn't know that Marks filed secret reports on their whereabouts and activities to some very high-placed German officials.

Film Propaganda

Apart from his dealings with American reporters Marks was also involved in propaganda for the Germans. He was instrumental in sending the first German war films to the United States and accompanied newsreel cameraman Ansel E. Wallace to the Eastern Front in January 1915. In fact, Marks' involvement with film propaganda continued throughout the war, as we discovered during a recent research trip to the Military Archives in Freiburg, Germany. Marks was in close contact with Major Hans von Haeften, the man who was the driving force behind the Bild- und Film Amt (BuFA) which was set up in the summer of 1916. This was the first attempt by the German government to coordinate and produce film propaganda. Though it did not really succeed in its aims to boost morale BuFA helped to lay the foundation for UFA and the thriving interwar German film industry.

Dr. Lewis H. Marks (third from left) and American correspondents at the Hotel Adlon, June 1915. Scene from Wilbur H. Durborough's war film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (USA, 1915)

Hans von Haeften had worked in military intelligence at General Headquarters for the Eastern Front and was very much interested in boosting official film propaganda. A report from the BuFA files at the Military Archives in Freiburg (RM/9901) refers to Von Haeften who was present at a meeting on July 29, 1916, saying: "Dr. Marks recently came to me in order to represent the interests of the American film companies. He said the Americans are not interested in sending cinematographers to Germany to make their own films. But they would like to see what movies are available and select the footage that is suitable for distribution in the United States."

Secret Report

We also came across Dr. Marks in a secret report by naval officer Captain Karl Boy-Ed. Here we have another fascinating figure in World War I history. As a naval attaché in the United States Boy-Ed had established a spy and sabotage ring until his undercover activities were disclosed. In December 1915 he was expelled from America and on his return to Germany Boy-Ed was put in charge of naval intelligence. Marks contacted Boy-Ed in 1916, and gave him confidential information on the American reporters. Boy-Ed's notes confirm Marks' secret activities, up to the point of suggesting which journalist could be bribed for any pro-German publicity and who couldn't be trusted. The report also mentions Von Haeften's propaganda activities and again shows that Dr. Marks knew him well.

Here is a copy of Boy-Ed's file on the American reporters, mentioning Lewis Marks as his undercover agent, including a translation into English.

Karl Boy-Ed (1872-1930)
Link to high res WW1 portrait from the National Archives

Dr. Lewis Hart Marks died in Paoli, Pennsylvania, in 1958.

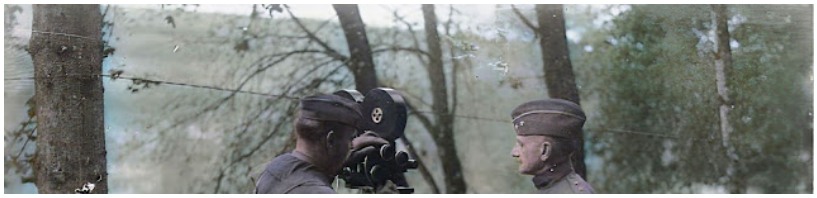
For more information on Marks and his secret dealings during World War I, check out our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:20 AM 2 comments:

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2017

World War I Combat Camera Edwin F. Weigle Found!

Radford Polinsky recently contacted us with some intriguing news about the discovery of an original combat movie camera that was cranked in 1918 by Lt. Edwin F. Weigle, one of the top American cinematographers in the First World War.



Edwin Weigle, demonstrating his Bell & Howell 2709 movie camera to General Peter Traub, Western Front, October 1918. Colorized picture.
Link to high res image

As described in more detail in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*, Weigle was the "star" cameraman for the *Chicago Tribune* who accompanied the Belgian and the German army. His films *On Belgian Battlefields* (1914) and *The German Side of the War* (1915/1916) were among the most popular contemporary World War I films released in America. When the United States entered the Great War Weigle was also one of the first officers to set up a photographic division for the U.S. Signal Corps.

Vintage *Bell & Howell* Movie Camera 2709

Weigle's camera is a Bell & Howell 2709, serial number # 250. The camera was identified by Jim Elyea who found a note saying this camera was picked up at the [Bell & Howell] factory by Lt. E. I. [sic] Weigle for the Signal Corps on June 1, 1918. The cameras are part of of his rental collection for *History for Hire*, a prop house that was started by Jim in 1985, which features a large vintage media collection. Jim explained: "It is one of four 2709s in our collection. I have no memory of when or where we got it. Right now, it has no movement, but if need be, we could probably install one from one of the other cameras."

We recently discovered Weigle went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma in June 1918 to film operations at the U.S. Army Artillery School. This previous weblog has more information on Weigle's film report. Given the date, Weigle probably used this specific Bell & Howell film camera to shoot these scenes. Shortly afterwards, Weigle was assigned to the 35th Division of the American Expeditionary Force. He went to France in the summer of 1918 and in October 1918 we have him shooting film of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.

Here is some of Weigle's footage taken with the 35th Division, that we found at the Imperial War Museum in London.

In our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*, we reproduced a picture that was taken shortly after this offensive in late October 1918, showing Weigle demonstrating a Bell & Howell 2709 to General Peter Traub, the commanding officer of his Division. Again, this seems to be the very same movie camera that is now in the collection of *History for Hire.*

U.S. Signal Corps Photo Section Motion Picture Unit in action. Sgt. 1st class Polinsky (left) served as camera operator, with Pvt. Maxwell as camera assistant. The camera is a 35 mm U.S. Signal Corps Liberty model from 1918. Photo courtesy Radford Polinsky.

Classic Hollywood Motion Picture Camera

Bell & Howell produced the 2709-types in different batches. Mary Pickford owned a 2709, serial number # 230 which was sold in February 1918. The Thomas Ince Studio bought a 2709, serial number # 241, sold on February 23, 1918. It stands to reason serial number # 250 was sold shortly afterwards in 1918, which ties in with the date on the note that was found by Jim Elyea. The first all metal camera with a four lense turret and twin compartment magazines, the 2709 Bell & Howell became a classic Hollywood motion picture camera. The design was so good that the basic camera body remained in production unaltered until 1957.

A film history fan, Radford Polinsky has participated with costumed World War I reenactors, using historic movie cameras from Jim Elyea's remarkable collection. "I work in the motion picture industry, and happily I went though film school back when they actually used film, so I have a basic grounding in the technology of film. I borrowed and brought a Signal Corps Liberty Model 35 mm hand cranked motion picture camera to show how some of the motion picture imagery used in World War I newsreels was captured. The owner of the camera is interested to let us use the Signal Corps Liberty Model to document World War I Centennial events. Now that we are well into the Centennial, we are getting serious about it!"

Check out the website of the Great War Historical Society for more photos of the 1918 U.S. Signal Corps Photo Section Motion Picture Unit in action at the Los Angeles National Cemetery Memorial Day event for 2010.

Great job, Radford and Jim. And many thanks for sharing this information with us. We hope you take good care of Weigle's film camera!

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:52 AM 2 comments:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2017

An American Newsreel Cameraman with the Serbian Army (1915)

The Serbian Film Archives (Jugoslavenska Kinoteka) recently shared with us new information on American cameraman Ariel Varges. As a result, we were able to identify a number of newsreels that were shot by Varges in 1915 when he accompanied the Serbian army during World War I.

Ariel Varges in the trenches. Copied from *Editor & Publisher*, 27 October 1917

Link to article in trade magazine

Ariel Varges (1890-1972) was one of the first pioneering newsreel cameramen in American film history. From 1914, he filmed for the *Hearst-Selig News Pictorial* and he remained a globe trotting war photographer throughout his career. As described in more detail in our book on the American cinematographers of the Great War, Varges came to Europe in December 1914. By using his close contacts with Sir Thomas Lipton, he got on a ship for the Serbian front and filmed the war in the Balkans.

First Foreign Movie Cameraman in Serbia

Varges was by all accounts the first foreign cameraman to film the Great War in Serbia. Upon reaching Belgrade he filed his first report for the *Hearst-Selig News Pictorial* No. 34 which was shown in the American theaters on April 29, 1915. This newsreel has scenes showing Sir Thomas Lipton with Serbian Red Cross officials, as well as the first pictures shown in the U.S. of Crown Prince Alexander, king regent of Serbia. In the collection of the Jugoslavenska Kinoteka is footage shot by Varges that was released in the United States between July-September 1915. These films are a most valuable addition to the newsreel footage by Varges that we had found earlier on at the Library of Congress in the John E. Allen Collection.

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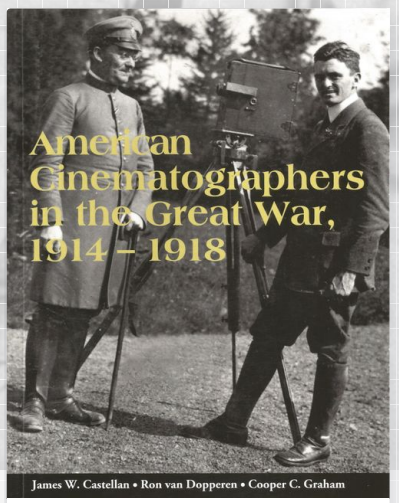

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Anatomy of an Authentic World War I Combat Scene (1915)

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An American Newsreel Cameraman with the Serbian Ar...
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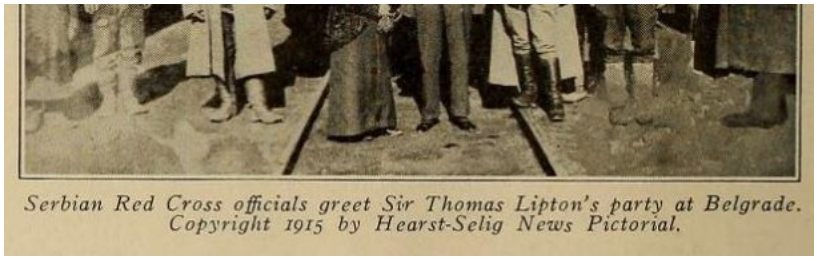

Scene from *Hearst-Selig News Pictorial* No. 34, filmed by Ariel Varges. Copied from *Motography*, May 8, 1915
Link to low res image

The first newsreel report by Varges from Serbia that we could identify in the collection of the Jugoslavenska Kinoteka was *Hearst-Selig News Pictorial* No. 54 (1915) which has a remarkable close up of Major Vojislav Tankosić, one of the founders of the Black Hand group which was instrumental in recruiting Gavrilo Princip, the man who killed Austrian Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo, thus propelling Europe into the First World War. The intertitle for this specific scene credits Tankosić for causing World War I which is somewhat exaggerated but the scene is of great historic interest. Our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War* has more information on how Varges managed to interest this high ranking Serbian officer to pose in front of his movie camera.

Photograph from A. E. Wallace's scrapbook. On the back is marked "Danube Trench", no. 8. It is clearly a photograph taken in conjunction with *Hearst Selig News Pictorial* no. 71, September 25, 1915, which was shot by Varges with the Serbian army. Wallace was a colleague of Varges and shot film in wartime Germany. Courtesy Cooper C. Graham

Infantry Engagement

Varges' newsreels taken with the Serbs contain scenes taken in Nish, where the Serbian Army had set up temporary headquarters. In addition, Varges filmed military operations at the Serbian fortress of Semandria, a staged infantry engagement near Belgrade and wounded soldiers arriving on a transport at the American hospital in Belgrade. Altogether we were able to identify four U.S. newsreels that have Serbian war scenes taken by Varges, based on reviews in the trade paper *Moving Picture World*.

Varges' newsreels were posted online by the Jugoslavenska Kinoteka on the website of the European Film Gateway. We are most thankful to Aleksandar Erdeljanović, Head of the Film Archives, for sharing links to these clips with us. We have added references to the original American newsreels, as well as quotes from the reviews in the movie trade press, to compile this video on Varges' newsreels of the Serbian army during World War I. All rights to the original footage are held by the Jugoslavenska Kinoteka.

In February 2018, the Serbian magazine *Blic* published this article on Varges' film report showing Major Tankosić.

Here is a series of articles from the *San Francisco Examiner*, published in 1915, on Varges and his film work with the Serbian army.

How the American Newsreel Men Invaded Mexico (1916)

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► July (3)
► June (8)
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Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:45 AM No comments:

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2017

Film Propaganda in the U.S.A.

At the outbreak of war in 1914 the United States soon became an important target for foreign propaganda. Both the Entente and the Central Powers tried to influence public opinion in America. The years of neutrality between 1914 and 1917 in fact turned into a 'battleground' which also included the American movie theaters. For the first time in film history movies were used in a professional way by various agencies and governments for wartime propaganda purposes. Sometimes this even resulted in riots in the film theaters between pro-Allied and pro-German Americans.

Albert Dawson, war photographer. Copied from *Deutsch-Amerika*, 15 September 1917. Colorized picture.
Link to original high res image

Case Study

As a case study for one of the earliest attempts to use motion pictures for this purpose, authors Cooper C. Graham and Ron van Dopperen in 2013 published *Shooting the Great War: Albert Dawson and the American Correspondent Film Company*. In this book we described the workings of a secret film campaign that was financed and set up by German officials in Berlin in 1914, and how the German authorities tried to use cinematographer Albert K. Dawson as a front man to make pro-German movies for release in the American theaters. Based on records from the German Foreign Office, the Austro-Hungarian military press office as well as personal information on Dawson's life and work, we offer the reader a unique opportunity to follow this American cameraman into the trenches of the First World War and witness his adventures at the front. The book also explains how Dawson's films were used as propaganda.

Scenes from one of Dawson's war films (1915)

An extended, eigtht edition of the book (both in paperback and hardcover) appeared in July 2024 and can be

ordered on Amazon.com

For some fascinating background information on film propaganda in America during World War I, which also mentions Dawson and his film company, here is a link to another weblog.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 9:12 AM No comments:

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2017

How the American Newsreel Men Invaded Mexico (1916)

In a previous weblog we mentioned how in 1916 newsreel cameraman Tracy Mathewson followed the U.S. Army into Mexico during the Punitive Expedition against Pancho Villa. The war in Mexico was an important training ground for a number of cinematographers who soon after went to Europe and filmed on the battlefields of France.

American film reporters in Chihuahua, Spring 1916. Copied from *International Photographer*, October 1933, page 29
Download link to trade magazine (56 Mb)

Ignoring official regulations Mexico was invaded by many American cameramen, as this picture shows that we recently found in a 1933 edition of *International Photographer*. The U.S. Army had agreed on allowing only one official photographer to accompany the military expedition. But in the spring of 1916 - when Pancho Villa's border raid into the U.S.A. was making headlines across America - all the newsreels were represented. A false report had come in that Villa was assassinated at Chihuahua City and all the cameramen immediately grabbed a freight train and went down there.

The Men Behind the Movie Camera

It was on this occasion that this picture was taken. The cameramen from right to left in the back row are: Tracy Mathewson of the Hearst newsreels, Dick Burrud of *Gaumont News,* next to him Gilbert Warrenton working for the *Universal Animated Weekly*. The man cranking Warrenton's movie camera is United States consul Letcher. Next to Letcher we have Beverly Griffith of *Universal* and next to him behind the Universal camera is Nicholas McDonald of the *Selig-Tribune Weekly*. The Mexican cranking McDonald's camera is the general of the Chihuahua district. The men in the front row are all American newspaper reporters.

PHOTO UNIT, 1ST DIVISION. Left to right: Lieut. Nicholas McDonald, S.C. Private J. Elmer; Sergt. John A. Marshall, Photographer; Sgt Marschall, SC. Location: Montabaur, Germany.

Date: January 9, 1919. NARA Ref#: 111-SC- 46057

Nicholas McDonald (left) with the First Division, American Expeditionary Army, 1919. U.S. Signal Corps photograph from the National Archives. Colorized picture, courtesy Harry B. Kidd
Link to original high res image

Nicholas McDonald

Nicholas McDonald featured before in an earlier weblog. In February 1917, he got in a plane and with permission of General Pershing filmed the American operations in Mexico.

Here are some interesting contemporary newspaper stories on his film work in Mexico.

After the American entry into the First World War McDonald was attached to the 1st Division as a Lieutenant of the U.S. Signal Corps photographic unit. Later General Pershing promoted him to Captain and assigned him to GHQ of the American Expeditionary Force. McDonald filmed at Chateau-Thierry, St. Mihiel and the Argonne offensive and twice received citations for bravery. President Poincaré awarded him with the Croix de Guerre. He reportedly did most of the principal photography for *Pershing's Crusaders* (1918), America's first official war film that was produced by the Committee on Public Information (CPI). After the war, McDonald worked for Walter Niebuhr's American Cinema Corporation. His photographic career came to a sudden end in February 1923 when his flashlight set off a huge explosion. As a result, McDonald lost his right arm.

Filming a battle near Exermont. While shells burst in the foreground Capt. Nicholas McDonald, Sig. Corps, courageously cranked his machine and made 600 feet of what Lieut. Pierre Marcel, chief of the French photographic section pronounced the best shot ever made of actual conflict. A battery of the 6th F. A. was on the crest of the opposite hill. Its position became untenable and it was compelled to move to another position.

McDonald (right) filming on the Western Front, October 1918. Signal Corps picture from William Moore's book *U.S. Offficial Photographs of the World War* (1920)
Link to high res image

This news story in the *Oregon Daily Journal* of September 21, 1919, has more on McDonald's film work during World War I.

Cameraman Is Home From Front

Captain McDonald Often in Thick of Fray Making Motion Picture Records.

WHEN General John J. Pershing landed on American soil on the

Leviathan last week there was with him as a member of his general staff, Captain Nicholas McDonald, cinematographer with the American expeditionary forces. When America entered the war the government sent the country's foremost cameramen to the battlefront, a photographic unit being established with each division. Lieutenant McDonald was placed in charge of the photographic unit of the first division. Later General Pershing promoted McDonald to a captaincy and assigned him to the headquarters of the A. E. F. Thereafter Captain McDonald filmed all the great historic events which marked the close of the war, including the peace conference, President Wilson's tours and General Pershing's reception in Paris, Brussels and London.

Captain McDonald has been recognized for the last five years as one of the foremost of the country's news weekly photographers. In 1915 he made the official Canadian army pictures under Sir Sam Hughes, and in 1916 he was in Mexico with Pershing as the motion picture representative of the Chicago Tribune. He was commissioned in the signal corps of the United States army in 1917, and filmed the major portion of "Pershing's Crusaders."

Captain McDonald's work in France during the last year and a half was marked by many notable and hazardous feats. He was active with his camera at Chateau-Thierry, in St. Mihiel and at Argonne. During the Argonne drive while Captain McDonald was driving his automobile to the front a bursting shell tore open his gasoline tank and all the gasoline ran out. Using the rubber tubing from his tire pump McDonald connected an emergency can of gasoline with his carburetor and managed to finish his trip to the front at Hill 240 Exermont. He has twice received citations for meritorious service.

When Captain McDonald arrived with General Pershing he was immediately besieged by numerous offers from motion picture concerns, but it developed that he had already concluded arrangements by cable with Walter Niclauhr by which his exclusive services for a long period of time are given to the American Cinema corporation. As soon as Captain McDonald has received his discharge and has taken a much needed rest Mr. Niclauhr will send him in charge of a photographic unit on a trip around the world.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 5:18 AM No comments:

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Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company*. James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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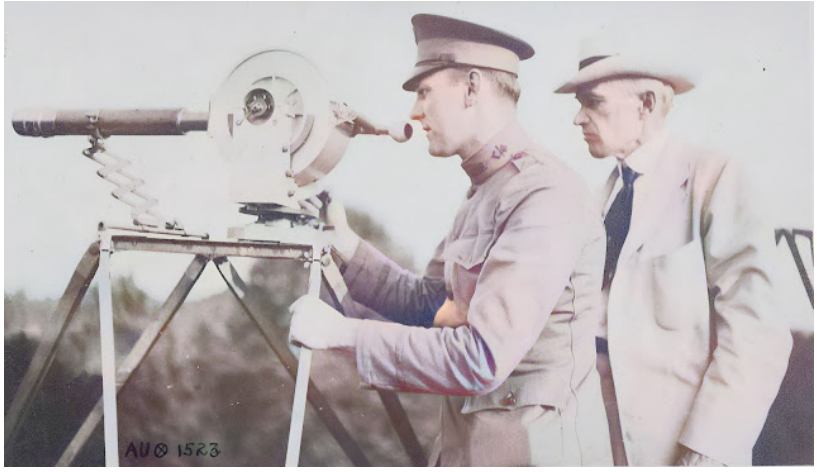
First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

MONDAY, AUGUST 28, 2017

Censoring Official World War I Films (USA, 1918)

In World War I films were closely scrutinized by military censors. This happened to American cameramen who went to Europe to film the Great War, but it also happened to the official cinematographers of the U.S. Signal Corps who were assigned to cover the war after the United States had entered the First World War in 1917.



Lt. Edwin F. Weigle and Carl Akeley, inspecting new type of film camera (December 1917). Colorized photo from the collection of the National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Link to high res image

"Star" Cameraman

We recently came across a production file in the National Archives on a film that was shot in June 1918 by Lieutenant Edwin F. Weigle at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Shortly after Weigle had finished this report he went to Europe and filmed with the 35th Division in France. Weigle's war films have been described in more detail in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*. He was the "star" cameraman of the *Chicago Tribune* and filmed with the Belgian and German army in 1914-1916. When America came into the war Weigle was one of the first cameramen to join the U.S. Signal Corps.

The documents on Weigle's film report present us with some interesting information on how his movies were cut by the censors. Weigle had gone to Fort Sill on an assignment to film various scenes at the School of Artillery Fire. Apart from the handling of different types of guns, he filmed a night barrage with Browning machine guns, soldiers throwing hand grenades into barbed wire and the operation of trench mortars. The footage was shot for episode 62 of the series *Pictorial History of the War of 1917* which was produced as an historical record for the General Staff.

Scene from Weigle's war film (1918)

Although these films were not taken for publicity purposes there was no exception to the rule that all footage had to

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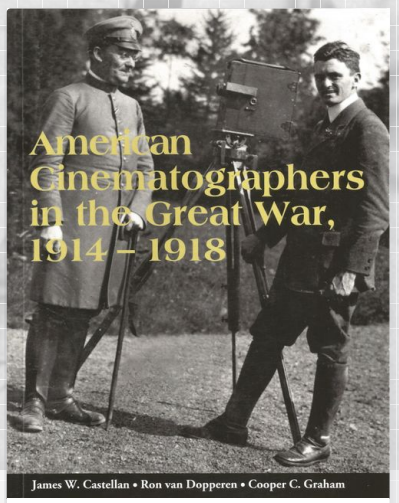

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Censoring Official World War I Films (USA, 1918)

be censored at the War College in Washington, D.C. Both the film titles that were submitted by Weigle as well as the actual film scenes were all checked. Weigle had filmed French 37 mm artillery guns and these scenes were all deleted, presumably because these would show the Americans were dependant at the time on foreign military equipment. Any information that could be of interest to the enemy was also cut out of his films, such as a scene showing a comparison between the smallest and the largest gun in the U.S. Army and an intertitle mentioning how much time it would take to train an artillery officer.

Considering the fact that these films were made as an historical record it makes you wonder what the military censors did to the official war films that were shown in the American theaters at the time for promotional purposes.

Compilation Film

In 1936 Weigle's footage was edited into a Signal Corps compilation film on World War I field artillery training. Unfortunately, as a result of this compilation, Weigle's original scenes showing machine gun operations and the exercises with trench mortars and hand grenades were not used and seem to have disappeared. But his film on different types of artillery in action has survived.

Here is a download link to the complete production file on Weigle's 1918 film project.

For more information on how the National Archives is working on preserving World War I film check out this article.

We have uploaded parts of this film with scenes shot by Weigle on our YouTube channel.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:42 AM No comments:

MONDAY, AUGUST 21, 2017

Anatomy of an Authentic World War I Combat Scene (1915)

Authentic combat film of World War I is so rare that at least one eminent World War I historian dismissed the notion filmed scenes might be real. "It's all fake. Nobody filmed a single battle," as Jay Winter, emeritous professor of history at Yale University, was quoted in Tony Dokoupil's February 18, 2008, Newsweek article "The War We Forgot".

Close up frame 574: Note the bulge appearing in the soldier's neck, as the soldier suddenly reacted and moved his right hand toward his head
Link to high res image

True enough, while researching our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War* we came across some examples of film scenes that were staged. The reasons for re-enacting these scenes are complex. Sometimes a shot was reconstructed because the cameraman wasn't on the spot in time to set up and capture the event. Sometimes a scene was staged that had never even happened because it would make for a sensational movie. However, not all World War I shots were faked and in some instances a camera operator was able to record a stunning scene of actual fighting.

Anatomy of an Authentic World War I Combat Scene (...
War Film Reports by Ariel Varges Now Online
Now Available - "First to Film: Leon H. Caverly an...
Lost and Found - "On Belgian Battlefields" (USA, 1...
► July (3)
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On the Firing Line with the Germans (USA, 1915)

Wilbur H. Durborough's film *On the Firing Line with the Germans*, which was restored in 2015 by the Library of Congress, presents us with a fascinating example. In the summer of 1915, American photo journalist Durborough and his camera operator Irving Guy Ries accompanied the German army during their attack on the Eastern Front. The Germans were pushing the Russians out of Poland and rushed neutral war correspondents to the front near Warsaw to reap the propaganda benefit. Near the village of Bloni Ries set up his motion picture camera while German soldiers were taking cover behind a stone wall. The intertitle in Durborough's film is: "Surprised by Russian snipers at Bloni, in which one man was wounded, and we were very nervous for a few minutes while the 'fun' lasted."

Intrigued by this scene, co-author Jim Castellan asked nitrate vault manager George Willeman at the Library of Congress for a breakdown of these shots, which resulted in 51 sequential frames that were analyzed in close detail. There were some interesting conclusions. First, the supposed casualty was not firing when he got shot by the Russian sniper, but appears to be reloading or unjamming his rifle while taking cover behind the wall. Then something strange happens: the German soldier suddenly begins to keel over his left side at the same time as his right arm leaves his rifle and travels quickly toward his neck.

Durborough filming war (1915). Colorized picture. Source: *Cine Mundial*, March 1916
Link to original high res image

Crucial Detail

Jim Castellan next discovered a crucial detail in frames 573-576. "I saw a bulge quickly form just below the soldier's right ear and jaw area, increase in 574, appear the same size in 575 and then disappear in about a fifth of a second. Although not for the German soldier, the Bloni casualty captured on film was a million dollar lucky shot. Firstly the film didn't have a dramatic bullet exit which the censors wouldn't have permitted Durborough to keep. Secondly, the bullet hit just enough bone and tissue along its path and stopped just short of exiting a fleshy area that caught the rapid ballistic expansion and collapse of the flesh on film".

In short, the most logical explanation for this briefest of tissue bulge is the film captured an original gun shot wound to the head - an authentic World War I combat scene. The sudden bulge appearing on this unfortunate German soldier's face was likely from a Russian sniper, as explained in the intertitle of Durborough's film. A bullet's impact on human flesh is demonstrated in this BBC video, using ballistic gel that simulates a similar rapid expansion and rebound of soft human tissue as the bullet passes through.

As a further illustration we have compiled a selection of slow motion shots and close ups from this combat scene in Durborough's film, which can be seen here on our YouTube channel with comments by authors Cooper Graham and Jim Castellan.

We recently prepared a new, extended story on Durborough's photographic work during World War I. You can read this Durborough Film Annotation (2nd edition) here.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:27 AM 2 comments:

MONDAY, AUGUST 14, 2017

War Film Reports by Ariel Varges Now Online

The British Universities Film & Video Council has launced "News on Screen", an impressive online resource for the study of newsreels and cinemagazines. As a result, we found 47 records of scenes shot by American cinematographer Ariel Varges between 1916 and 1919, which makes it possible for the first time to do a close analysis of his film work during World War I.

Left: The horrors of war - A woman moving to another village taking with her the bones of her dead son, decorated with marigolds, the native mourning flower. Balkan Front, June 1916. Photograph by Ariel Varges. Right: Varges ready for a a motion picture flight, copied from *American Cinematographer*, July 1938
Link to article in trade magazine

Celebrated War Photographer

Varges was one of the first newsreel cameramen in American film history. A celebrated war photographer, he worked for William Randolph Hearst and filmed with the Serbian and the British forces between 1915 and 1919. His work has been described in more detail in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*. Until recently, we had only found one World War I newsreel shot by Varges in the collection of the Library of Congress. These scenes were shown in *Hearst-Selig News Pictorial* No. 71 and were exhibited in the American theaters on September 6, 1915. Varges' film shows Serbian soldiers guarding the forts at Semandria.

After the fall of Belgrade in October 1915, Ariel Varges followed the Serbian army during the harsh winter march into the Balkans. He ended up in Salonika (now Thessaloniki) in the north of Greece, where the Entente forces were opening a second front against the Central Powers.

Filming the Expeditionary Army in Salonika

Varges was by all accounts the only official cameraman who covered the activities of the Expeditionary Army around Salonika, Greece, in 1916. Because of this special interest his films were used extensively by the British War Office for publicity purposes and released through the Topical Film Company. A total of 29 contemporary war scenes credited to Varges and shot in this area have now been identified, all with a release date from March 1916 for the newsreel *Topical Budget* that was shown in the British theaters twice a week. Based on these online records we were also able to identify 7 newsreel scenes from the film collection of the Imperial War Museum as having been taken by Varges at this frontline sector.

While Varges was filming the military build-up around Salonika the city was frequently bombed by the enemy. This was an important subject in his movie reports. *Topical Budget* No. 238-2, released on March 18, 1916, featured an air raid on Salonika. Here is a summary of these scenes as shot by Varges:

> *[SUBTITLE]: "German aircraft[s] flying from the Bulgarian lines, drop bombs on the Allies base at Salonika but are brought down by our airmen." French soldiers guarding captured German reconnaissance plane, with Greek civilians looking on. The plane is carried and pushed away.*

Ariel Varges Lifting Unexploded Bomb from Debris of Wrecked Zeppelin

Ariel Varges in Salonika, copied from the trade paper *Moving Picture World*, 1 July 1916
Link to low res image

Varges later also covered a Zeppelin attack on the city, as well as the damage as a result of this bombardment. Actual frontline footage appears to have been rare in his film reports. Varges mostly captured transport of military supplies to the trenches, artillery engagements, scenes of Red Cross work, refugees from the Balkans finding a safe place around Salonika and prisoners of war taken from the firing line. The records show that he was fond of recording picturesque subjects. The Serbs he filmed while taking mass before going into battle. When they were withdrawn from the lines, he had them dance a victory performance in front of his movie camera.

French General Sarrail inspecting Russian troops upon their landing at Salonika, 30 July 1916. Photograph by Varges, from the collection of the Imperial War Museum

"The Armies of the Allies"

The international coalition against the Central Powers that was formed at Salonika was another important theme in Varges' film reports. For the British newsreels he filmed how British officers reorganized the Serbian army, how Russian troops arrived in the harbor to reinforce the Expeditionary Army, and how soldiers from Australia and New Zealand were fighting the Bulgars in the trenches around Salonika.

As a typical example, here is a report on the scenes for "The Armies of the Allies", a subject that he shot for *Topical Budget* No. 272-2, released on November 11, 1916:

> *[SUBTITLE]: "An interesting group of the nationalities fighting the Central Powers in the Balkans. British, French, Russian, Italian, Serbian, Indian, Cretan, Senegalese, Greek, and Anammite [sic] type of soldiers." Awkwardly posed group (in a V-shape) of soldiers posed for the camera, each a representative of the various races fighting for the Allies in the Balkans. An officer hands out cigarettes to them and they all light one another's cigarettes. They march in a line past the camera.*

Varges' movie camera sometimes also captured celebrities visiting Salonika, like in this report for *Topical Budget* No. 270-2, released on October 28, 1916:

> *[SUBTITLE]: "His Majesty the King of Greece visits a hospital ship." March past of Greek sailors. View down as King and officers come on board up steps from lighter.*

General Danglis, Eleutheros Venizelos and Admiral Condouriotis arrive at Salonika on 9 October 1916, to establish a provisional Greek Nationalist Government in opposition to King Constantine. Photograph by Ariel Varges. Courtesy Imperial War Museum

Varges' final contribution on the war at the Salonika front appeared in *Topical Budget* No. 292-2, released on March

3, 1917, with scenes showing an artillery duel in Serbia. By then, he had joined the British forces to another theater of war: Mesopotamia (Iraq/North-East Syria). We will return to this episode in his work as a war photographer in another upcoming weblog.

The scenes shot by Varges around Salonika that we could retrieve at the Imperial War Museum have been uploaded on our YouTube channel.

Click this link for a complete list of all references to Ariel Varges and his films for the British during World War I.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:15 AM 3 comments:

TUESDAY, AUGUST 8, 2017

Now Available - "First to Film: Leon H. Caverly and the U.S. Marine Corps"

As previewed in this weblog, the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television* recently published an article on Leon H. Caverly, the first cinematographer who accompanied the American Expeditionary Force to France in 1917 to film the Great War. The article by authors Cooper C. Graham and Ron van Dopperen has been published online on the website of Taylor & Francis. The story will be available in print next year.

Marine Corps Publicity Bureau, New York, May 1917. From left to right: Captain Ross E. Rowell, Quartermaster Sergeant Leon H. Caverly and still photographer Private Lester E. T. Woodward. Signal Corps colorized photograph from the National Archives. Courtesy Harry Kidd
Link to high res image

Abstract

Here is a short summary of our article:

On June 14, 1917, the Fifth Regiment of the U.S Marine Corps left New York. True to their reputation the Marines were in the first wave of American soldiers sailing to Europe. On board was official cameraman Leon H. Caverly. With the centennial of America's entry into World War I, Caverly's pictures take on a new significance. Months before the U.S. Government set up a policy on how to deal with pictures covering the war the Marines had already sent Caverly to Europe. He was by all accounts the first official cinematographer to film the Great War with the American forces. The story is

also significant because it is so well documented. We were extremely fortunate in having found Caverly's personal papers. Reading his letters from the frontline it becomes clear what sort of challenges a cameraman had to face to film the Great War. Apart from his own account much of Caverly's work has survived. At the New Jersey Historical Society the authors located about 500 World War I pictures taken by Caverly. The History Division of the U.S. Marine Corps also kindly shared with us a collection of Caverly's photographs. In addition the authors were able to locate and identify much of his war films. All of this makes it possible to reconstruct Caverly's extraordinary experiences as a war cameraman in remarkable detail.

While researching Caverly we compiled numerous pictures that he took during his military service in France. A selection of these photographs is available for download here.

In the National Archives at Washington, D.C., we also located Caverly's films taken with the Marines and the 2nd Division. Caverly's films have a remarkable wide scope and cover the period from the arrival of the first American soldiers in France until the occupation of Germany in 1919.

Caverly's films are listed in this Appendix that accompanies our article.

Free ePrints Available Here!
Taylor & Francis offers free ePrints of the article, available by clicking on this link.

Also, here is a selection of footage from the National Archives with Caverly's World War I films that we uploaded on our YouTube channel.

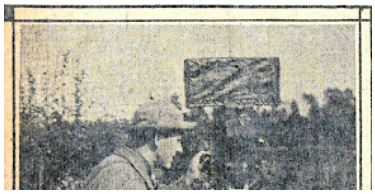
In 2018, Richard Pelster-Wiebe - who had been very helpful with our research on Caverly, wrote his dissertation on Caverly's film work during World War I. Here is a link to his publication.

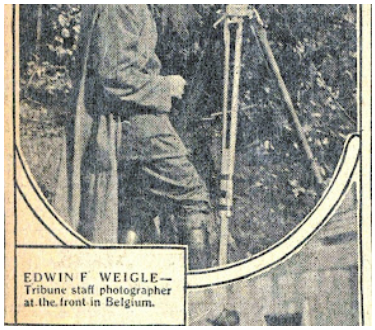
Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:56 AM No comments:

THURSDAY, AUGUST 3, 2017

Lost and Found - "On Belgian Battlefields" (USA, 1914)

The Chicago Tribune's *On Belgian Battlefields* is ranked as one of the most popular films on the Great War that was shown to the American people in 1914. Now sadly lost, the movie featured cameraman Edwin F. Weigle's report on the German attack on Belgium. Thanks to painstaking research by local historian Walter De Swaef from the Belgian city of Alost (Aalst) a scene from this historical film has been located and identified.





Weigle filming war in Belgium. Copied from the *Chicago Tribune*, 11 February 1915
Link to high res image

Edwin Weigle's film adventures in World War I have been described in more detail in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*. Weigle was the Tribune's star cameraman who had just before the outbreak of the Great War filmed the U.S. Marines attack on Vera Cruz, Mexico. After the outbreak of war he filmed in Belgium, Germany as well as on the Western and the Eastern front. When the United States entered the First World War Weigle was among the first officers to set up a photographic division for the U.S. Signal Corps which had been assigned to cover the American involvement in World War I.

Filming Alost in Flames

In his book *My Experiences on the Belgian Battlefields* (1914) Weigle described how he accompanied the Belgian army from Antwerp on several trips to the frontline. On September 27, 1914, Weigle reached Alost (Aalst) which was under heavy fire by the retreating German army. Here he shot film as well as still photographs of the destroyed railroad bridge across the river Dender. Walter De Swaef was able to identify Weigle's film report of this scene because it has a full match with a still photograph by Weigle which was published in his book, as well as a similar picture that was printed one month after the event took place in the *New York Times*:

City of Alost in flames, photographed by Weigle. From the *New York Times*, 25 October 1914.
High res image (7Mb) available for download here.

Walter explains: "In your book *American Cinematographers in the Great War* I first read about Weigle, and that's how I found a reference to his book on his experiences in Belgium. Somewhat later I saw the movie fragment showing the burning of Alost and having checked out Weigle's book on page 44 I noticed his photograph with the caption "The burning of Alost showing destroyed R.R.Bridge". This picture was published in our book on Alost during World War I, *Duitse Oorlogsgruwel in Aalst*. Then it occurred to me I had seen this scene before on film but with the wrong intertitle "Bombardment of Ghent". The fragment from his movie is most remarkable. You will notice the black smoke above the houses in the center of the picture. Behind these houses was a factory that produced chemical agricultural stuff. In the morning of September 27, 1914, the German artillery bombarded this part of Alost. The complete factory and the houses around all burned down. Weigle must have taken his pictures there in the afternoon of September 27, around 2 P.M. when the Germans stopped bombarding the city for a couple of hours. I suppose that Weigle at this time also was able to enter the city and take some photographs and films of the damage. In order to do this he must have climbed on the damaged railroad bridge. Considering the dangerous situation he was in Weigle's visit to Alost seems to have been short."

Weigle evidently did not take any unnecessary risks while shooting these war scenes. As he admitted in his own book, either prior to his visit to Alost or the following night he was forced to spend the night in a barn outside of the city. These pages from his book *My Experiences on the Belgian Battlefields,* including the photograph mentioned by Walter De Swaef, have more information on Weigle's visit to Alost in September 1914.

Film Collections

Walter De Swaef found Weigle's report in two different film collections. The movie scene appears to have been edited into a compilation film produced during World War I, which is now in the stock collection of Periscope Films. An extended version of Weigle's film scene was found in the collection of the Royal Belgian Film Archive. This version has tinted film and was restored in 2002. We have uploaded all of these scenes on our YouTube channel. In addition, according to Walter De Swaef, Weigle's still picture of this scene appears to have been reprinted in 1915 in the German military magazine *Landsturm*.

Also, here is link to a previous post on another film showing the city of Alost during the Great War, that Walter was

able to identify, shot by American cinematographer Arthur Radclyffe Dugmore.

Great job, Walter, and keep up the good work!

With special thanks to Walter De Swaef for his input on this weblog

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:48 AM No comments:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

FRIDAY, JULY 14, 2017

New Film Found Showing Sir Roger Casement (1915)

Sir Roger Casement featured before in an earlier weblog in which we described how the only known extant footage of this controversial Irish freedom fighter was filmed. Casement appeared before the movie camera in April 1915 when he was trying to enlist the Germans' support in a general rising against England and the raising of an Irish Brigade. We recently found an extended scene from this unique historic footage in a contemporary newsreel.

ALL OVER THE WORLD WITH HEARST
INTERNATIONAL FILM PICTORIAL
(Released in New York Motion Picture Theatres To-day)
(Copyright, 1916, by Hearst International Film Pictorial.)
THE GREAT IRISH MARTYR, SIR ROGER CASEMENT. A remarkable film taken in Belgium after the opening of the war.

Advertisement for Hearst International Film Pictorial, *New York American*, 4 August 1916, the day after Casement was executed
Link to high res image

Casement was filmed by Albert K. Dawson, an American cinematographer who was in Berlin at the time. With the assistance of American correspondent Franz Hugo Krebs, Casement was persuaded to pose for a film and photo shoot in the hotel where he was staying. The full story can be read in an article by authors Cooper C. Graham and Ron van Dopperen for the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television,* that appeared in 2016.

Extended Film Scene

In a compiled newsreel that was uploaded by Periscope Films we recently found a new scene that was taken by Dawson during this film and photo shoot. In these shots Casement can be seen smoking a cigarette while talking to the American reporters. This sequence was originally released in the American theaters in *Pathé News*, No. 45 on June 3, 1916, two months before Casement was executed by the British because of his involvement in the Easter Rising. (Source: *Motography*, 17 June 1916, page 1411)

The newsreel compilation from the Periscope Film collection can be viewed here.

We have uploaded Dawson's film from this collection on our YouTube channel.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 9:30 AM No comments:

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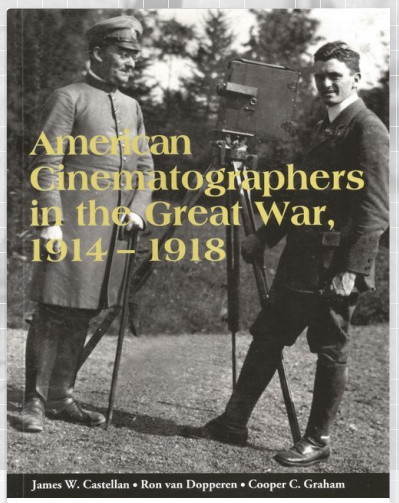

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Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television

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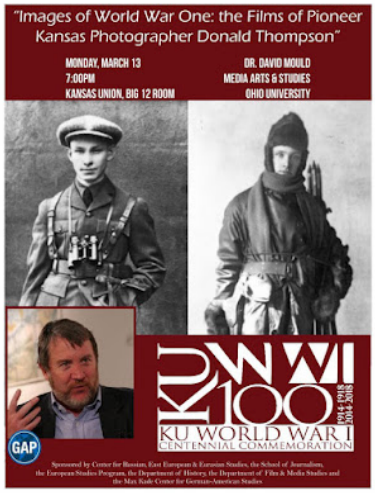
New Film Found Showing Sir Roger Casement

MONDAY, JULY 10, 2017

The Films of Pioneer Kansas Photographer Donald C. Thompson

On March 13, media historian David Mould lectured on World War I cameraman Donald C. Thompson. His presentation *Images of World War I - The Films of Pioneer Kansas Photographer Donald C. Thompson* was part of a series of presentations by Kansas University on the centennial of the First World War.



Lecture at Kansas University

David H. Mould, Ph.D., is Professor Emeritus of Media Arts and Studies at Ohio University. Thompson has been one of his favorite research subjects ever since Mould did his master thesis on the news films of World War I in the 1980s. In this lecture at Kansas University David Mould tells about Thompson's approach to news coverage, how he projected his self-promoted image of the "photographer/adventurer", gained access to the frontlines and staged some of his war scenes. To give the audience a proper sense what it was like to watch a war film in those days David shows a selection of scenes from Thompson's movies, accompanied with contemporary music.

Opening scene from Thompson's film *War As It Really Is* (USA, 1916)

These scenes are very interesting. To start with David Mould presents clips from Thompson's film *With the Russians at The Front* which was shot on an assignment for the *Chicago Tribune* in 1915. Mould has some fascinating inside information on the making of this movie, based on letters by Robert R. McCormick, the *Chicago Tribune* co-editor who accompanied Thompson during this trip. Next he shows parts of Thompson's film *Somewhere in France* (1915) and a good copy of Thompson's subsequent movie which was produced with the French army in 1916: *War As It Really Is.*

The German Curse in Russia (USA, 1918)

David Mould recently edited Thompson's letters to his wife which were written during his stay in Russia while he was covering the Russian Revolution and the war against Germany on the Eastern Front. Shortly before his presentation at Kansas University David contacted us on our discovery of footage from Thompson's film *The German Curse in Russia* (USA, 1918). We had made a reconstruction of this remarkable film by Thompson, based on films in the Axelbank Collection, which was also in David's presentation.

For more information here is a link to David Mould's recent article "Images of War" in the *Journal of Russian-American Studies* (May 2017)

A recent interview with David Mould on this subject was also published in this newsletter of the Center for Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies (Fall 2017).

We have uploaded David Mould's presentation on Thompson on our YouTube channel. Thank you, David, for sharing your latest research with us!

(1915)
The Films of Pioneer Kansas Photographer Donald C....
Lost & Found - The Collapse of the 35th A.E.F. Div...
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Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:55 AM 1 comment:

TUESDAY, JULY 4, 2017

Lost & Found - The Collapse of the 35th A.E.F. Division (1918)

On September 26, 1918, the American Expeditionary Force (A.E.F) was sent into the abyss that was called the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. The battle cost 26, 277 lives, making it the largest and bloodiest operation of World War I for the Americans. Among the casualties were many soldiers of the 35th Division, a unit that virtually collapsed under the strain of modern warfare. Footage showing the aftermath of this terrible battle was found recently by the authors in the archives of the Imperial War Museum.

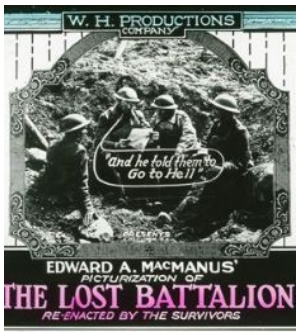
Major General Peter E. Traub learning a few points about moving picture camera from Lt. Edwin F. Weigle. U.S. Colorized Signal Corps photograph taken by Weigle's camera operator Pvt. Thomas J. Calligan, 18 October 1918, Sommedieu, France.

Link to original high res image

When zero hour came the American infantrymen discovered that General Pershing had sent them into terrain that was only a few removes from hell. Inside the Argonne Forest ravines, hillocks and meandering streams added to the obstacles created by the trees and dense underbrush that reduced visibility to 20 feet. Throughout the valley, the Germans had added every imaginable man-made defense. General Hunter Liggett, who commanded I Corps on the American left, soon realized the place was 'a natural fortress, beside which the Wildnerness in which Grant and Lee fought was a park.'

The Lost Battalion (USA, 1919)

The Meuse-Argonne Offensive provided film history with a suitable backdrop for *The Lost Battalion* (USA, 1919), a movie based on the actual experiences of soldiers from the 77th Division who had found themselves completely cut off and surrounded by German forces. While all of this was happening nearby their comrades of the 35th Division were at risk of being completely annihilated. After only 5 days of fighting the 35th Division rapidly became combat ineffective. One reason for the 35th Division's poor performance was inadequate training. But the division's greatest failure lay in grave lapses in its leadership as a result of mistrust between the unit's Regular Army and National Guard officers.



Film poster *The Lost Battalion* (1919)

Collapse at the Meuse-Argonne

Author Robert H. Ferrell in his book *Collapse at the Meuse-Argonne* (2004) places the blame squarely on divisional commander Major General Peter E. Traub who sowed confusion within the unit by relieving all infantry brigade and regimental commanders and replacing them with Regular Army officers only days before combat started. As a result, when the attack was launched the chain of command ceased to function and the 35th Division suffered over 7,000 casualties.

Shortly after the division was pulled out of the line on October 1, 1918, the soldiers were transported to a quiet

sector near Verdun where they could rest and recuperate. On October 18, cameramen Edwin F. Weigle and Thomas J. Calligan filmed General Traub on an inspection tour of his men. We could identify the cameramen because of a still photograph which has their names and shows how General Traub posed before their movie camera. As mentioned in a previous post, Weigle was the photographic officer of the 35th Division and an experienced war photographer who had previously covered the Great War for the *Chicago Tribune*. Weigle and Calligan on that same day also filmed men of 'C' Battery, 130th Field Artillery of the 35th Division, carrying ammunition in a wood near Sommedieue, as well as the sole surviving officers of the 1st Battalion, 138th Infantry Regiment. As an interesting side line, Battery D of the 129th Field Artillery Regiment of the 35th Division at this time was commanded by Captain Harry S. Truman, the future President of the U.S.A.

Opening scenes from our video clip

The smiling faces of General Traub and these surving officers, as recorded by Weigle and Calligan, do not reveal the true tragedy that had taken place only three weeks before. But the scenes remain an important source on the history of the 35th Division and the American Expeditionary Force during World War I.

For more information on the cameramen of the 35th A.E.F. Division in France check out this previous weblog.

We found the footage in a compilation film at the Imperial War Museum. The movie was produced by the U.S. Signal Corps in 1919, showing U.S. forces and French airmen on the Western Front (catalogue number IWM 501-3). Here is a clip from this film reel:

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:26 AM No comments:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant

scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 28, 2017

War Cameraman Ansel E. Wallace Revisited

Following up on our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War* now and again new stories are discovered. Recently we found an interesting newspaper article on Ansel E. Wallace, newsreel cinematographer for William Randolph Hearst who went to Europe in December 1914 and shot film at the Eastern Front with the German army, covered the submarine warfare on the English Channel and later went to Italy shortly after the country had entered the Great War.

Wallace with German officers on the Eastern Front. Copied from the *Boston American*, 29 August 1915
Link to high res image

In our book we described how Wallace previously covered the Mexican Civil War for a pro-Huerta motion picture shoot. Military commander José Victoriano Huerta Márquez in 1913 during what was called *The Ten Tragic Days* with the help of U.S. Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson secretly plotted to overthrow the government of President Madero. Huerta established a harsh military dictatorship and under pressure by the Wilson administration and rival forces in Mexico resigned the presidency on July 14, 1914.

Filming the Mexican Civil War

Wallace filmed Huerta in January 1914 for the Hearst newsreels and had the nerve to make movies of the Mexican dictator while he was having a drink in a local bar. The newspaper story that we found sheds some new light on how he was released from prison. The fellow American reporter who helped him get out of jail was William G. Shepherd. In 1915, during his stay in Europe, Wallace met Shepherd in Germany, Paris and Rome. As a matter of fact, United Press correspondent William Gunn Shepherd (1878-1933) proved to be a notable source of information during our research because of his book *Confessions of a War Correspondent* (1917).

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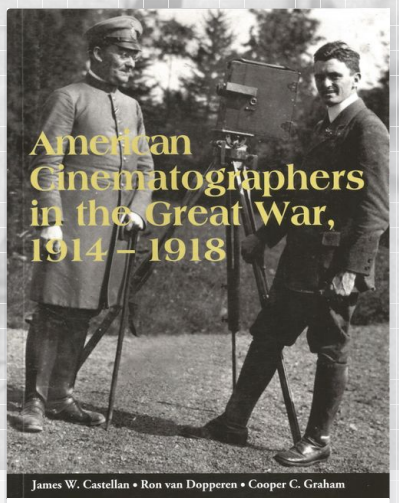

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Anatomy of an Authentic World War I Combat Scene (1915)

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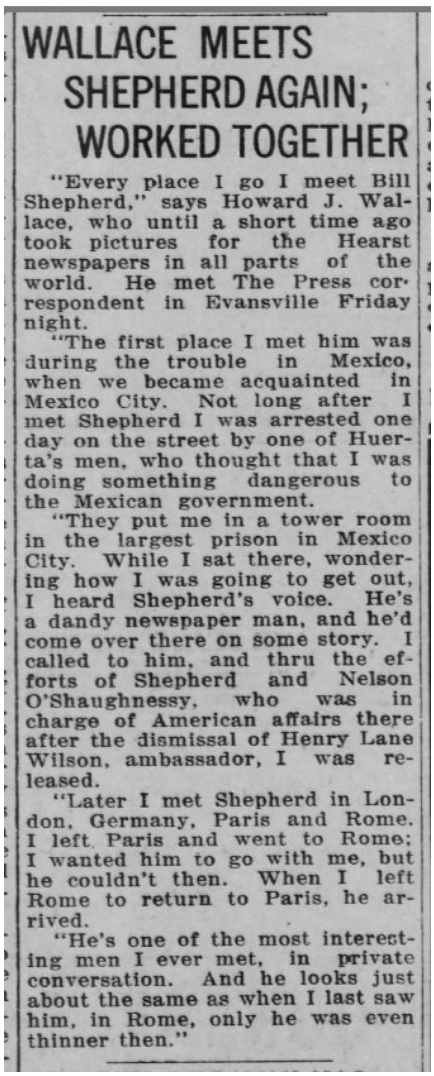
William G. Shepherd. Picture from Chris Dubb's book *American Journalists in the Great War* (2017)

As a neutral correspondent, Shepherd had the opportunity to cover the Great War from the perspective of the Entente as well as the Central Powers. His memoirs contain interesting inside information on how correspondents from America were manipulated by the press censors of the warring nations in Europe. As it turns out, the interview Wallace did in 1918 after he had returned to his hometown Evansville, Indiana, indicates that he had visited Paris, both before and after Wallace had covered the war in Italy with his movie camera. This is something that we couldn't establish while researching our latest book.

We have posted before in this weblog on Wallace's film work during World War I. Here is a earlier post on his experiences covering the war in Italy in 1915.

For those interested in Shepherd's newspaper work during World War I here is a download link to his book *Confessions of a War Correspondent*. The newspaper story from the *Evansville Press* of March 23, 1918, on Wallace's wartime experiences - his first name is misspelled - can be read here.



WALLACE MEETS SHEPHERD AGAIN; WORKED TOGETHER

"Every place I go I meet Bill Shepherd," says Howard J. Wallace, who until a short time ago took pictures for the Hearst newspapers in all parts of the world. He met The Press correspondent in Evansville Friday night.

"The first place I met him was during the trouble in Mexico, when we became acquainted in Mexico City. Not long after I met Shepherd I was arrested one day on the street by one of Huerta's men, who thought that I was doing something dangerous to the Mexican government.

"They put me in a tower room in the largest prison in Mexico City. While I sat there, wondering how I was going to get out, I heard Shepherd's voice. He's a dandy newspaper man, and he'd come over there on some story. I called to him, and thru the efforts of Shepherd and Nelson O'Shaughnessy, who was in charge of American affairs there after the dismissal of Henry Lane Wilson, ambassador, I was released.

"Later I met Shepherd in London, Germany, Paris and Rome. I left Paris and went to Rome; I wanted him to go with me, but he couldn't then. When I left Rome to return to Paris, he arrived.

"He's one of the most interesting men I ever met, in private conversation. And he looks just about the same as when I last saw him, in Rome, only he was even thinner then."

Postscript July 2019: Wallace on the Eastern Front

On his return to the United States in July 1915, Wallace was interviewed by the *New York American* on his experiences as a war photographer at the Eastern Front. This article also was found after we had published our book on the American cinematographers of the First World War. The newspaper story is particularly interesting because in this interview Wallace claimed that near the city of Skierniewice the Germans staged a major battle for the benefit of his movie camera. Cavalry and infantry regiments charged into a wood where the Germans had placed 6,000 Russian prisoners of war who played the part as captives. According to Wallace, the scene was also set up to impress a group of neutral military attachés who accompanied the Germans at that time.

Here is a link to this interview with A.E. Wallace.

Postscript May 2022: Polish Newspaper Report on Wallace

War Cameraman Ansel E. Wallace Revisited

New Trailer Online: "Shooting the Great War" (US...

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The Cameramen of the 35th A.E.F Division (1918)

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Wallace's coverage at the Eastern Front recently featured in a Polish report published by the newspaper Eglos. This story has more details on the scenes filmed by Wallace in the city of Skierniewice when he accompanied the German army in 1915. In this article, the Polish reporter also refers to Wilbur Durborough's film and photographic coverage on the Eastern Front, mentioning some new discoveries on his photographic work in Russian Poland.

Here is a link to this newspaper story (translated to English)

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 5:28 AM 3 comments:

SUNDAY, JUNE 25, 2017

New Trailer Online: "Shooting the Great War" (USA, 1914-1918)

Since starting this weblog a lot of fascinating World War I footage has been found which could be identified to one of the film correspondents described in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*.

Here is a compilation of some of these films. Contemporary music - Gustav Holst's *Mars*, composed at the outbreak of World War I - has been added to this clip. Enjoy!

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 10:42 PM No comments:

FRIDAY, JUNE 23, 2017

Wilbur H. Durborough and the Mexican Revolution (1913-1914)

When in 1913 the Mexican Revolution hit the headlines many cameramen from the United States flocked to the country. To satisfy America's public demand for coverage the Newspaper Enterprise Association (NEA) sent Wilbur H. Durborough to join Pancho Villa's army. As described in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*, Durborough became quite friendly with Villa and obtained some excellent pictures of Villa's troops.

W.H. Durborough (second from right) and Arthur Ruhl (second from left) in Mexico, 1914
Link to low res image

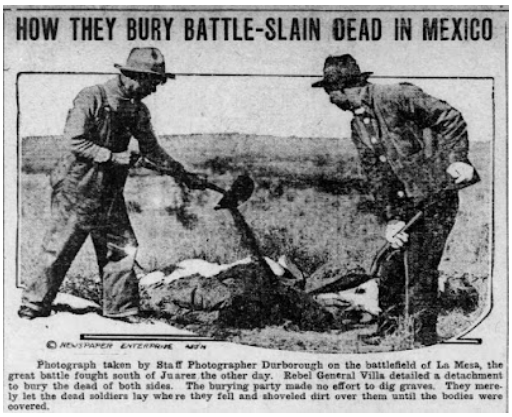
Mexico's First Superstar

Villa became Mexico's first superstar when in 1914 he signed a movie contract with Mutual, agreeing to keep other film companies from the battlefield and to fight in daylight wherever possible. Despite all exclusive provisions this did not deter other film companies such as Pathé and Universal to try to cover Villa's army. The list of newsreel men, photographers and cinematographers who crossed the Rio Grande and entered Mexico at this period is long and impressive. In fact, the Mexican Revolution turned out to be a training ground for many cameramen who soon afterwards went to Europe to film the Great War.

Despite excellent research on this subject, notably by Mexican film historian Margarita de Orellana, some tantalizing new pieces of information on this remarkable episode in film history are still being discovered. Recently we found a photograph on eBay which has an NEA stamp on the backside and is dated July 16, 1914. The caption says: "Durborough in Mexico". The picture shows Durborough holding his Graflex camera, together with three men looking at what appears to be a corpse.

We haven't been able so far to identify the other men, except for Arthur Ruhl who was a reporter for *Colliers* and the *New York Tribune*. Ruhl was with Durborough when the U.S. Marines landed at Vera Cruz and attacked the waterworks at El Tejar. The picture may have been taken at this occasion.

Durborough had been with Pancho Villa before the U.S. Marines attacked Vera Cruz and he had covered similar scenes before. In December 1913, he photographed the Battle of La Mesa when Villa's men fought the Federalist Army. After the battle he photographed this burying party:



Burying the dead on the battlefield of La Mesa. Photograph by Wilbur H. Durborough, copied from the *Evansville Press*, 3 December 1913

We recently prepared a new, extended story on Durborough's photographic work during World War I. You can read this *Durborough Film Annotation* (2nd edition) here.

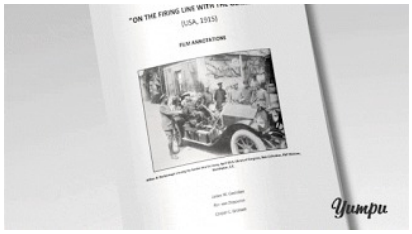


Photo-Journalist Otis Aultman

When Durborough first went to Mexico he also had his picture taken together with Pancho Villa. Mexican historian Luis Arturo Salmeron recently posted this photograph on his Twitter account. The photograph was taken by Otis A. Aultman, another interesting figure who had gone to Mexico at the time.

Left: Otis Aultman behind his movie camera in Mexico. Right: Wilbur H. Durborough and Pancho Villa at Tierra Blanca, 1913
Link to low res image (right)

Aultman was born in 1874, in Holden, Missouri. As a young man he learned photography from his older brother. In 1908, after a divorce from his wife, he moved to El Paso. There he first worked for Scott Photo Company and later started his own firm. Aultman was a man in the right place at the right time. He photographed the battle of Casas

Grandes, the first battle of Juárez in May 1911, and the Orozco rebellion in 1912. He was a favorite of Pancho Villa, who called Aultman "Banty Rooster" because he was only 5'4" tall. Aultman worked for the International News Service and Pathé News and experimented with cinematography. In 1916 he appears to have been one of the first photographers to arrive at Columbus, New Mexico, after the famous raid on that town by the Villistas.

The website of the El Paso Historical Museum has more information on Aultman.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:43 AM No comments:

MONDAY, JUNE 19, 2017

The Cameramen of the 35th A.E.F Division (1918)

When the United States entered World War I photographic field units were assigned to each division of the American Expeditionary Force. The authors recently came across more information on these military cameramen. We even recognized some familiar faces of two American "star" photographers who went over there to cover the Great War and get the picture.

Official War Photographers

The pictures that we found are from the website of the National World War I Museum and Memorial. These pictures were taken between August 1918 and January 1919 and show the official photographers of the 35th Division, American Expeditionary Force (A.E.F.). Built around a nucleus of Nebraska, Kansas and Missouri National Guard units, the 35th Division trained for World War I in the vicinity of the old Sante Fe trail, and therefore adopted the insignia which represents the Sante Fe Cross.

Cameramen of the 35th A.E.F Division, Alsace, August 1918

The 35th Division landed in France on May 10, 1918. After training a few miles from the hard-pressed British line near Amiens the Division was sent to a quiet sector in the Alsace. It was in this area near the German border that this picture above was taken.

Motion picture cameraman Thomas J. Calligan - his name was misspelled in the caption - is also in a picture from October 1918. This photograph was taken shortly after the 35th Division had to be taken from the line at the battle of the Meuse-Argonne. Because of a combination of incompetent leadership, inexperienced soldiers and having to fight superior troops of the Prussian Guards the 35th Division collapsed, suffering 7,300 casualties. We will return to this sad episode in an upcoming blog.

Filming General Traub

On October 18, 1918, Private Thomas Calligan cranked a Bell & Howell 2709 movie camera at Sommedieu near the Verdun frontline. His photographic officer directing this scene was Lt. Edwin F. Weigle. Together they filmed their divisional commander, Major-General Peter Traub. Weigle's film adventures during World War I have been described in more detail in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*. Edwin Weigle was a news photographer who worked for the *Chicago Tribune*. After the outbreak of war he filmed in Belgium, Germany as well as on the western and the eastern front. Until January 1919, Weigle was the photographic officer of the 35th Division and in command of his team of camera operators. Weigle was also one of the first cameramen assigned to

set up the photographic division of the U.S. Army Signal Corps in 1917.

Here is a picture showing how Weigle and Calligan took Major-General Traub's picture.

On the very same day, Calligan also took this picture of General Traub inspecting their movie camera together with Weigle.

"The Camera Kid"

Weigle stayed in France until February 1919 and arrived back in Chicago as a Signal Corps Captain in June 1919. When he left a new photographic officer was assigned to the 35th Division. And here we have another familiar name. The new lieutenant in charge of Weigle's photographic team was Adrian C. Duff. Nicknamed "The Camera Kid" because of his youth, Duff made national headlines in February 1912 when he got in a plane with aviator Frank T. Coffyn and for the first time in history photographed New York City from above. Like his colleague Weigle he had covered the attack by the U.S. Marines on Vera Cruz in April 1914, as well as the German bombardment of Antwerp later that year. Duff died in a tragic car accident in New York City shortly after the war.

Photographic Unit, 35th Division, A.E.F. From left to right: Pvt. H.C.T. Sproule, Pvt. Roland C. Price, 2nd Lt. A.C. Duff, U.S. Signal Corps, Pvt. Thomas J. Calligan. Picture taken at Commercy, Meuse (France) on January 22, 1919

Here is a link to a previous weblog on Duff's extraordinary life and work.

We have uploaded all photographs showing these cameramen of the 35th Division on this Flickr picture album.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:01 AM No comments:

FRIDAY, JUNE 16, 2017

Edward Steichen in the Great War, 1917-1918

The first modern fashion photographer, best known for his shadowy portraits of movie stars like Gloria Swanson, Marlene Dietrich and Louise Brooks, Edward Steichen (1879-1973) hardly needs an introduction. We mentioned Steichen briefly in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War,* because he was in 1917 one of the first cameramen to join the U.S. Signal Corps when America entered the Great War.

From painter to photographer: self portraits by Edward Steichen (1902/1917)

Link to high res image right

Steichen (third from left) with the Signal Corps in France, 1918
Link to high res image

Newest Weapon of War

As mentioned before in an earlier weblog, when Steichen joined the Signal Corps he initially worked with Albert K. Dawson and Edwin F. Weigle, two war photographers who had been with the German and Austro-Hungarian army before the United States entered the war. In his autobiography *A Life in Photography*, Steichen described how in July 1917 he entered active duty with the goal of becoming “a photographic reporter, as Mathew Brady had been in the Civil War”. He quickly abandoned this romantic notion to help implement the newest weapon of war, aerial photography. While on military duty in France, Steichen helped adapt aerial photography for intelligence purposes, implementing surveillance programs that had a lasting impact on modern warfare.
In his memoirs he later reflected: “The wartime problem of making sharp, clear pictures from a vibrating, speeding airplane ten to twenty thousand feet in the air had brought me a new kind of technical interest in photography … Now I wanted to know all that could be expected from photography.”

Pictures from Steichen's World War I photo album: American bomber over enemy trenches and the ruins of Forges, French Argonnes

Steichen, photographed in 1918 when he was Chief Photographic Section U.S. Air Service
Link to low res image

Exposition Art Institute Chicago

From June until October 2014 the Art Institute of Chicago held an exposition on Steichen's photographic work during World War I. Focusing on rarely seen Steichen photographs drawn from the Art Institute’s collection, this exhibition included a unique album of over 80 World War I aerial photographs assembled and annotated by Steichen himself.

As these pictures show, Steichen's personal and professional experiences during the Great War contributed in developing a more crisp photographic style. Although the exposition has been closed his work for the U.S. Signal Corps in France can still be seen online at the website of the Art Institute of Chicago.

In 2015, the book *Camera Aloft: Edward Steichen in the Great War* appeared. Author Von Hardesty in this book described how Steichen volunteered in 1917 to serve in the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF). He rose rapidly in the ranks of the Air Service, emerging as Chief of Air Photography during the dramatic final offensives of the war.

Here is a presentation on this remarkable book by researcher Gene Eisman.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:38 AM No comments:

MONDAY, JUNE 12, 2017

World War I in Motion: Archival Clips from the Library of Congress

On June 7, author Cooper C. Graham presented a selection of some of the finest World War I films from the nitrate vaults at the Library of Congress. Digitally preserved from rolls of 35mm nitrate film stock, much of this historical footage has never been seen in nearly 100 years and was found during the research for our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*.

Cooper Graham speaks during the June 7th exhibition lecture *World War I in Motion* in the Whittall Pavilion. Photo courtesy Library of Congress

The Library of Congress has an extensive film collection on the Great War. There are hundreds of reels of U.S. Signal Corps film, propaganda films by the Commitee on Public Information, as well as contemporary newsreels. Last year, Cooper Graham was asked to make an inventory of the huge number of films at the Library dealing with America's entry into the World War in 1917 for a digitization project. The results are by no means complete, and much remains to be done. A former film curator at the Library of Congress, Cooper was familiar with the collections. With the centennial of World War I the time had come to share some of his World War I film discoveries.

Selected clips from the exhibition *Echoes of the Great War* at the Library of Congress

Cooper's lecture *World War I in Motion* was well received by the audience. All chairs at the Whittall Pavillion of the Thomas Jefferson Building (Library of Congress) were filled, with about a third Library of Congress staff. During his talk Cooper discussed selected clips from one of the most interesting film collections at the Library of Congress: the John E. Allen Collection. This collection of ten million feet of nitrate film is one of the most important of its kind. It contains World War I and World War II era actualities, dramatic pictures from the sound era, quite a number of unique silent films from the New York area studios and the “all-black newsreels” from the 1940s. Together, these collection holdings are of inestimable research value for historians, scholars and educators across the country.

World War I Film Collection

The World War I footage in this collection is of particular interest. While researching the American film cameramen of the First World War we were able to find many scenes shot by these cinematographers in this specific collection, notably newsreels taken by Ansel E. Wallace and Ariel L. Varges for the Hearst organization, as well as scenes shot by cameraman Albert K. Dawson for the American Correspondent Film Company, and an amazing sound rerelease of Frank E. Kleinschmidt's film *War on Three Fronts* (USA, 1916).

To commemorate the centennial of America's entry into the First World War the Library of Congress has opened the exhibition *Echoes of the Great War: American Experiences of World War I*. Much of the film that is shown at this exhibition comes from the John E. Allen Collection.

Here is a link to the online exhibition on the website of the Library of Congress.

Would you like to know more about Cooper's film research and publications? Here is a link to his personal website.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:07 AM 7 comments:

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7, 2017

"First to Film: Leon H. Caverly and the U.S. Marine Corps" (1917-1918)

On June 14, 1917, - almost one hundred years ago - the Fifth Regiment of the U.S Marine Corps left New York harbor. True to their reputation the Marines were in the first wave of American soldiers sailing to Europe. On board was official cameraman Leon H. Caverly.

Leon H. Caverly in France (1918). Colorized picture courtesy U.S. Marine Corps/History Division
Link to original high res image

First Cinematographer in France

Caverly was by all accounts the first cinematographer to film the Great War with the American forces in France. We were extremely fortunate in having found Caverly's personal papers describing his experiences as a war photographer. Based on his letters from the front, as well as numerous photographs and films taken by Caverly, we were able to reconstruct his extraordinary life and work as an official cameraman with the U.S. Marine Corps and the 2nd Division of the American Expeditionary Force.

Caverly's story presents an interesting case study on the military cameramen who covered World War I. Our article on Caverly will be published in an upcoming issue of the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television.*

We will keep you posted on this latest project!

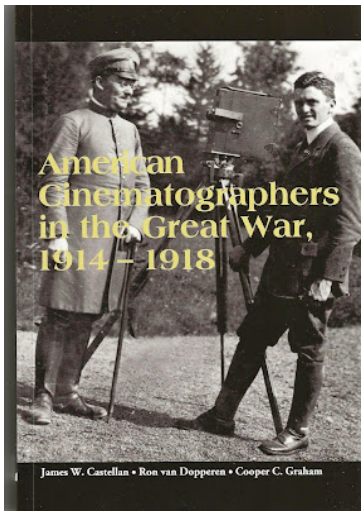
Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:18 AM No comments:

MONDAY, JUNE 5, 2017

Book Review "American Cinematographers in the Great War"

We were pleased to receive a copy from our publisher John Libbey of a review by the *Society for German-*

American Studies on our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*.



Reviewer Petra DeWitt described our publication as a "fascinating yet overly detailed study of previously unknown photographers who overcame military opposition, government censorship, and the dangers of battle to record still and moving images of the war and in the process revolutionized journalism."

DeWitt continues to say that the book is of special interest because of the chapter on the publishing tycoon William Randolph Hearst and his role in sending American cameramen to wartime Europe for the purpose of bringing back newsreels and images that would attract paying customers to movie theaters and subscribers to his newspapers.

"Must-read for journalism majors"

In the final lines the review concludes: "This study is a must-read for journalism majors and historians of photography or film. The general reader, however, may at times have difficulties following the detailed biographical information interwoven into descriptions of events and evaluations of movies. This work, nevertheless, contributes greatly to the history of propaganda during World War I."

Thank you for this review! Admittedly, our book does go into some detail, but we wanted to reconstruct this story on how the First World War was filmed by these pioneering cameramen from the United States as truthfully as possible.

The full book review can be read and downloaded here.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:44 AM No comments:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company*. James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

WEDNESDAY, MAY 31, 2017

War in Warsaw (1915)

On August 5, 1915, after almost one hundred years of Russian rule, the German Army captured Warsaw. The fall of Warsaw marked the latest in a series of victories for the Central Powers which had started with the Gorlice-Tarnów offensive in southern Poland in May 1915. Its capture was followed by a major Russian withdrawal, aimed at preventing the risk of encirclement.

Kaiser Wilhelm II bestowing Iron Crosses in Warsaw. In the background is the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral of the Russian Orthodox Church. (Photo © Imperial War Museum). Colorized picture

The Kaiser and the Cameraman

The capture of Warsaw was featured before in the article *The Kaiser and the Cameraman* (2010) by Cooper C. Graham on the experiences of Wilbur H. Durborough at the Eastern Front in 1915. In this article, Cooper described how Durborough and his camera operator Ries filmed Warsaw, shortly after the city had been taken by the German forces. For their movie *On the Firing Line with the Germans* they captured scenes showing fresh German troops moving through the main streets, the Alexandrovski Bridge, pontoon bridges built by the Germans across the Vistula, Zeppelins flying over the city, as well as scenes showing the Jewish Quarter in Warsaw.

As mentioned before in this weblog, Durborough's film was recently restored by the Library of Congress and is now available in the public domain.

Although Durborough's film doesn't show any evidence of this, the German occupation of Russian Poland turned out to be a highly controversial subject. Under German rule Poland was reordered and put under tight military control. The Germans however failed to regulate Warsaw's economy, and as a result the cost of living increased by about 600 percent during the German occupation.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:14 AM No comments:

FRIDAY, MAY 26, 2017

Reconstructing Hindenburg's Victory at Tannenberg (1914)

Although numerous contemporary World War I films have been lost a lot of footage has also been preserved because it was recycled into TV documentaries. During our latest research for our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War* we came across some striking examples showing how historical film scenes could be retrieved and identified this way. This recycling process took place as early as during World War I.

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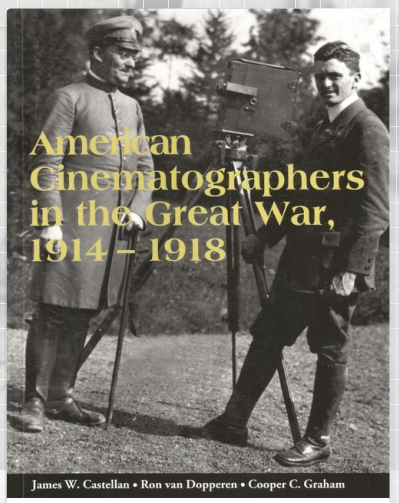

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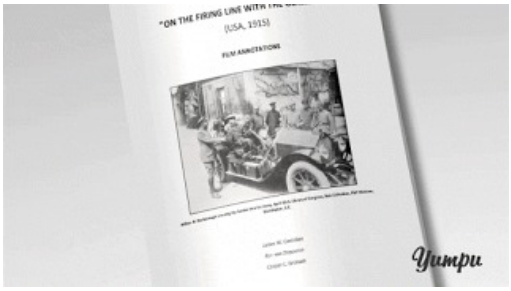
German infantry charge, photographed by Durborough. This picture was staged at a training ground. Copied from the *New York Times* July 4, 1915
Link to high res image

On the Firing Line with the Germans (USA, 1915)

Wilbur H. Durborough's film *On the Firing Line with the Germans,* which was restored by the Library of Congress in 2015, offers an interesting example. Because of the restoration we were able to reconstruct the original edit from 1915. Scenes from Durborough's feature documentary film turned up in U.S. Signal Corps footage, as well as TV documentaries on the Great War by the BBC, CBS and the recent *Armageddon* series on World War I. We were surprised to find out that as early as during the Great War the Germans used scenes from Durborough's movie, showing the attack by the German army into Russian Poland, which he accompanied on the Eastern Front.

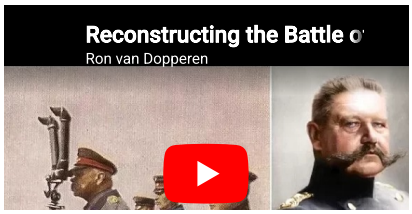
The same scene, as edited for a contemporary German war film

In a contemporary German World War I film, produced between 1916 and 1918, we found scenes that were supposed to show Field Marshal von Hindenburg's victorious campaign at Tannenberg in August 1914, which rescued East Prussia from the invading Russian army. Part of the footage however, especially the scenes showing German infantry jumping across ditches, was culled from reels 7 and 8 of Durborough's film which wasn't taken until a year after Von Hindenburg had directed his famous battle. The Germans apparently were so pleased with Durborough's film that they used it anyway for their own purposes. Ironically, the infantry charge scenes shot by Durborough and his camera operator Ries were probably staged at a training ground near Berlin or Hannover.



Click here for a new and extended article on Durborough's photographic work during World War I and the making of his film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (1915).

The original film can be viewed on the German Film Portal and comes from the collection of the German Film Institute. Here are scenes from this film which we posted on our YouTube channel.



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Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:33 AM 2 comments:

MONDAY, MAY 22, 2017

The Serbian Retreat by Samson Chernov (1915-1916)

After the capture of Belgrade in October 1915 by the Austro-German forces the Serbian army retreated to Albania, an event sometimes called the "Albanian Golgotha". During the long winter march of 1915-1916 the Serbs suffered around 150,000 casualties, including many soldiers who died from cold, starvation and disease. Covering the retreat with his camera was Samson Chernov.

***Lost in the Snow* - photograph of the Serbian retreat by Chernov, from the collection of the Library of Congress.**
Right: Samson Chernov, picture taken during World War I
Link to low res image right

Chernov (1887–1929) was a Russian cameraman who worked for the French film company Gaumont and became famous for his photographs of the Russo-Japanese War. He came to Serbia in 1912 as a correspondent for two Russian newspapers. During the second Balkan War he reportedly made two short films, *After the Capture of Adrianople* and *The Battle of Bregalnica*.

Pioneer of Cinematic War Reporting

In September 1914, the General Staff of the Serbian Army assigned Chernov as a cinematographer to the film crew of Djoka M. Bogdanović, owner of the cinema *Kasina*. Bogdanović - like Chernov a pioneer of cinematic war reporting - had produced films on the Second Balkan War, some of which have been posted on the Europeana Weblog. The crew filmed the events on the front near the Sava river, the city of Šabac in ruins, the crossing of the Serbian army over the Sava river and the destruction of Belgrade.

According to Serbian film historian Dejan Kosanovic, Chernov's films got lost during World War I but a fascinating collection of still photographs taken by Chernov during the Serbian retreat to Albania has survived. Chernov recorded the epic ordeal of the long winter march while at the same time capturing the suffering with images of men wandering around and dying in the streets of hunger and exhaustion.

Upon his arrival at Corfu, Serbian prime minister Nikola Pašić decided to send Chernov to Europe on a publicity tour. On June 5, 1916, in the gallery of the Royal Institute in London, he organized an exhibition on the Balkans in wartime since 1912. After America had entered the war Chernov also lectured in the United States.

The website of the Wilson Center has this interesting article on Chernov's photographic work during World War I.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:40 AM No comments:

MONDAY, MAY 15, 2017

Close Up: Albert Dawson Training War Photographers (November 1917)

In the collection of the National Archives we recently found a fascinating series of pictures featuring Albert K. Dawson who was captured while he was training the first official World War I cameramen in the United States in the art of war photography. These pictures were all taken in November 1917 shortly after Dawson had been commissioned a Captain in the U.S. Army Signal Corps.

Captain Albert K. Dawson (left) and Signal Corps photographers, November 1917. Soldiers learning to sight with 4x5 Graflex camera. Colorized photograph copyrighted Brown & Dawson.
Link to high res image

Born in Vincennes, Indiana, Albert K. Dawson (1885-1967) was one of the most enterprising cameramen of the First World War. Shortly after the outbreak of the Great War he went to Europe and filmed with the German army on the Western Front. In the summer of 1915 he joined the Austro-Hungarian forces during the attack on Russian Poland. He later covered the Bulgarian army in the Balkans. Dawson's movies were released in the United States by the American Correspondent Film Company in 1915-1916. We have described his film adventures in more detail in our books *American Cinematographers in the Great War* (2014), as well as *Shooting the Great War: Albert Dawson and the American Correspondent Film Company* (2013).

Training the First Official U.S. Photographers

Because of his recent experiences as a combat photographer Dawson was assigned to train the first official US cameramen. Before these photographers were sent to Europe Dawson gave them a crash course in still and motion picture photography. The Signal Corps had a slow and difficult start with this military photography program. It wasn't until January 1918 that at Columbia University a professional staff was set up for the first school of military photography and cinematography. From November 1917 Dawson trained his recruits at Washington Barracks and the photographs that we found were all taken at this location. At this stage of the war Dawson had been promoted to Captain and as supervising officer he was assigned to the War College in Washington, D.C, where he was in charge of the Signal Corps photographic laboratory, handling the screening of all war-related pictures from France that were shot by military cameramen in the field.

NOW CAPTAIN DAWSON

Lieut. Albert K. Dawson, of the Photographic Division of the Signal Corps, has just been made a captain. The promotion came as an agreeable surprise on last Saturday.

The boys of his detachment, photographers all, immediately presented their captain with his new silver bars which he is now wearing with great pride. Captain Dawson is of the firm of Brown & Dawson, of New York, news photographers.

From *Photographers Association News*, December 1917
Link to high res image

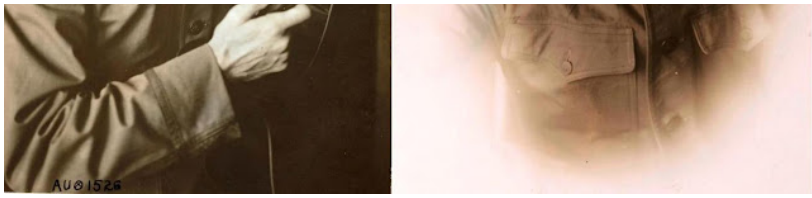
Graflex and Kodak Camera Training

The photographs that we found seem to have been taken for the Commitee on Public Information, America's wartime propaganda agency. These pictures show Dawson teaching his soldiers how to sight with Graflex and Kodak roll-film cameras. The photographs all have a "Brown & Dawson" copyright, the photographic firm that he worked for. There is also an interesting picture in this collection, showing one of his recruits learning how to handle a 3A Kodak camera. The copyright reference on this picture has Dawson's personal handwriting. Another picture has an interesting reference to the U.S. Engineer's School of Photography at Washington Barracks. Apart from the Signal Corps the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also sent soldiers to Washington Barracks for instructions in photography, as part of a course in military topography. Dawson may also have trained engineers at this place.

As mentioned before in an earlier weblog, the National Archives is doing a terrific job digitizing its World War I collection and as a result these gems from the past are now available for the public just by accessing their website. Apart from Dawson and his squad of Signal Corps cameramen, this picture file at the National Archives also has a number of interesting shots showing American military cameramen training in aerial photography in World War I.

We have uploaded these pictures featuring Dawson and his cameramen on our Flickr photo channel.

Postscript May 2020: Court-Martial Case File Discovered



Albert Dawson, December 1917, when he was a captain in the U.S. Signal Corps. Photographs from the National Archives
Link to high res image (left)
Link to high res image (right)

Despite his contribution to war photography for the U.S. government Dawson was dismissed from the army in March 1918. The authors were extremely lucky in having found his court-martial case file. Dawson was dismissed for having taken some photographic supplies from the Signal Corps laboratory. This was a technical charge. Behind the scenes the Military Intelligence Division was looking for a way to get rid of Dawson. You can read more on this episode in Dawson's adventures during World War I in our book *Shooting the Great War: Albert Dawson and the American Correspondent Film Company.*

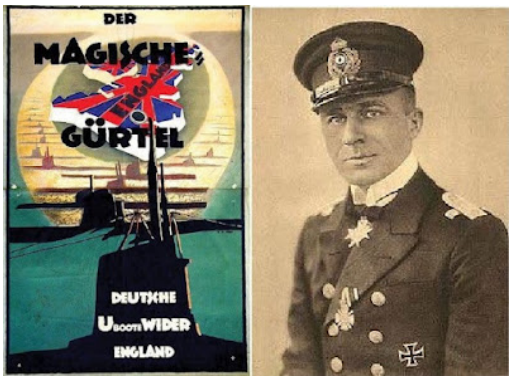
Here is a download link to the original case file on Dawson's court-martial in 1918.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:02 AM No comments:

TUESDAY, MAY 9, 2017

Submarine Warfare on Film - "Der Magische Gürtel" (Germany, 1917)

With 194 ships sunk, Lothar von Arnauld de la Perière was the most successful submarine ace ever. The German High Command, realizing they had a star performer in the Imperial Navy, in 1917 assigned a camera team to film his patrol of the *U-35* in the Mediterranean. The result is an astonishing movie on submarine warfare during the Great War.



Left: Movie poster *Der Magische Gürtel* (1917). Right: Submarine commander Lothar von Arnauld de la Perière

The Enchanted Circle (Germany, 1917)

Produced by the Bild- und Film Amt (BuFA), the film was approved by the German censor in August 1917 and subsequently screened in cinemas to wide acclaim. Ironically, the original German title *Der Magische Gürtel* is taken from a speech by Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty (1911-1915), who talked of liberating "our splendid Navy from the enchanted circle the [German] submarine has drawn around it."

A camera team joined von Arnauld and his submarine crew for a five-week tour of the Mediterranean in the spring of 1917, filming events as 10 ships were sunk. All the footage was shot on deck, as apparently the cameras weren't sufficiently light-sensitive to film inside the submarine itself. There is strong emphasis on the proper treatment of the crews from the defeated vessels, which were only sunk once the crews were safely in lifeboats.

Scene from *Der Magische Gürtel* (1917)

In an interview after the war with Lowell Thomas for *Raiders of the Deep* (1928), von Arnauld described how the cameraman operated:

> *"It was on this voyage that we had a movie man along. Poor devil! His face still haunts me. Pea green it was most of the time. You see, he had never before gone to sea on a submarine, and he was a sufferer from mal de mer in its most virulent form. Usually he stuck to his camera crank as a real film hero should. Shells and bullets and oncoming torpedoes could not drive him from it. But sea sickness did. There were times when he longed for a shell to come along with his name written on it, to end it all. Then, when Neptune waved his wand and stilled the rolling deep, that cinema man was a hero once more. If we got into a rough-and-tumble gunfight with an armed ship he would take his own sweet time and would coolly refocus his magic box and switch lenses as though it were a hocus-pocus battle on location instead of grim reality."*

The English would later use the movie as an anti-German film. A tinted version that fell into British hands formed the basis for the film's recent restoration by the Imperial War Museum. Unfortunately, this restored film version isn't available online at this moment.

After the war, the Americans also got hold of copies. Rowland V. Lee, a former actor at the Thomas Ince Studio, captured a film print at the American Occupation Headquarters in Coblenz. The footage was first distributed in segments in the *Hearst* newsreels in November 1919. The theatrical release of this American version - renamed The Log of the U 35 - was in January 1920. The Library of Congress and the National Archives in Washington, DC, hold the orginal footage. The National Archives have a viewing copy of this American version, as well as part of the original German film which can be watched online here. The Library of Congress has some nitrate on the film in several collections.

Here is a copy of the American revamp of this movie - *The Log of the U-35*- which has been uploaded on our YouTube channel.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:21 AM No comments:

FRIDAY, MAY 5, 2017

"Heroes of Gallipoli" (Australia,1915)

The only known contemporary film of the Dardanelles Expedition, *Heroes of Gallipoli* was shot in the summer of 1915 with an Aeroscope camera by British war correspondent Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett and photographer Ernest Brooks. It features intertitles by Australian war historian C. E. W. Bean. The historical film has been digitally restored by Peter Jackson, director of *Lord of the Rings*.

Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, British war reporter and cinematographer of *Heroes of Gallipoli* (1915)

Only 20 minutes of footage has survived, about one-fifth of the original 3000m of film, due to the unstable nature of early nitrate film stock. Because of its unique historical value the film has been listed on the Unesco Australian *Memory of the World* program, one of 60 similar programs around the world.

A remarkable achievement in film making under difficult battlefield conditions, the movie was made at Imbros

Island, ANZAC Cove, Cape Helles and Suvla Bay. It features Australian, New Zealand and British troops in military operations, as well as Turkish prisoners of war and excellent footage of the terrain. The film also shows soldiers in action in frontline trenches using periscope rifles—an Australian innovation—and remarkable scenes of a firefight and Turkish shells exploding in the enemy's positions.

Cinematographer Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett (1881–1931) was the eldest son of Sir Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett who was Lord of the Admiralty. Sir Ellis' interests took him to various theaters of war. At the age of 16 Ellis jr. accompanied his father with the Turkish army in the war against Greece and he served as a subaltern in the Boer War. He was a special war correspondent in the Russo-Japanese war, with the French campaign in Morocco and with the Italian army in Tripoli. In 1912 he was at the Turkish Headquarters during the First Balkan War.

Disaster at Gallipoli

In 1915, Ashmead-Bartlett was eager to join the ill-fated Dardanelles campaign, also known as the Battle of Gallipoli, the unsuccessful attempt by the Entente Powers to control the sea route to Russia during World War I. The campaign began with a failed naval attack by British and French ships on the Dardanelles Straits and continued with a major land invasion of the Gallipoli Peninsula on April 25, 1915, involving British and French troops as well as divisions of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. Lack of sufficient intelligence and knowledge of the terrain, along with a fierce Turkish resistance, hampered the initial success of the invasion. Gallipoli turned into a military disaster that led to the death of 45.000 Entente soldiers.

C.E.W. Bean and Ashmead-Bartlett in Gallipoli. Colorized picture

Reporting from the Front

While Ashmead-Bartlett was in London, he paid a visit to his literary agent who suggested that he should take a movie camera with him for his return visit to Gallipoli. He started taking lessons before he left Britain and used the Aeroscope camera at Anzac Cove, Cape Helles and Suvla Bay, but it wasn't until he ran into war photographer Ernest Brooks on August 4, 1915, that he realized he had been operating it incorrectly. Brooks took over as camera operator after Ashmead-Bartlett survived a scare at Suvla.

Here is Ashmead-Bartlett's own story on this incident, as quoted by Brian Best in his book *Reporting from the Front*:

> *'I left the battlefield at 8pm, stripped bare, with nothing left but my trousers and shirt. It came about in this way. About 5.50 the Turkish artillery fire on Chocolate Hill having diminished, I endeavoured to set up my cinema above the parapet of the partly destroyed trench to get some pictures of the wonderful panorama of the shellfire and burning scrub. The gunners were on me like a flash. I could not believe that they would have picked up a target so quickly. One shell whizzed past my head and stuck in the back of the trench without exploding. Then came another. I saw a bright flash and found myself in total darkness. I struggled to get clear but realised that I was buried. Shortly afterwards a spot of light appeared and I became conscious that I was being dug out. My benefactor turned out to be a soldier who had seen my mishap and who immediately ran to my assistance. I found the fuse of a high explosive shell lying on my legs but I had not received a scratch. My belongings did not fare so well. Owing to the heat, I had taken off my coat and placed it beside me with my small camera, walking stick, field glasses and waterbottle. They were blown to smithereens and, in any case, disappeared for ever. The infernal old cinema, of which I was heartily tired, the cause of all my troubles had, of course, survived and I was reluctantly compelled to drag it back to camp.'*

The original footage of *Heroes of Gallipoli* has been uploaded on our YouTube channel, as well as scenes from the restored version by film director Peter Jackson.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 11:31 AM 1 comment:

MONDAY, MAY 1, 2017

Shooting the Great War in Turkey

In November 1914, the Ottoman Empire entered the First World War. The Turkish government was aware that propaganda activities were necessary to promote the war effort. The first step was to demolish a Russian monument in the suburbs of Istanbul and film the event so that it could be shown to a large audience. First an Austrian company was commissioned to do the filming. However later it was decided that such a patriotic event had to be filmed by a Turk.

Captain von Schroeder explaining the workings of a German cinematographic camera to Enver Paşa, the Turkish minister of war. Colorized photo © Imperial War Museum

The task was given to Fuat Efendi, who was then under arms as a reserve officer. The problem was that while he had mastered film screening, Fuat Efendi did not know how to shoot film. It is told by several Turkish film historians that Austrian experts taught Fuat Efendi and on November 14, 1914, the Russian monument was demolished with Fuat Efendi recording the event. Thus the first motion picture shot by a Turk in Turkey was made.

Turkish Army Cinematography Office

In 1915, during his visit to Germany, the minister of war, Enver Paşa, watched footage taken by the German Army for purposes of propaganda and training. The Germans had even made a film of Enver's visit to a shooting range in Germany. Deeply impressed by what he had seen, Enver Paşa ordered the establishment of a cinematography branch in the Ottoman Army, modeled after its German counterpart.

The Central Army Cinematography Office was established in 1915. In its early stages, this office shot footage which was not directly related to military propaganda. Some of the first films were titled Enver Paşa's Horses and The Newly Born Child of Enver Paşa's Wife. Apart from meeting Enver Paşa's demands for self-promotion, these early films seem to have little historical value. The Army Cinematography Office was dissolved in 1918. During its short life, it managed to produce a significant number of documentaries and newsreels, using mostly camera equipment from Germany and Austria.

As described in our book, *American Cinematographers in the Great War*, the Germans were particularly interested in showing war films in Turkey to boost public morale, and in 1916 they sent Hearst cameraman Nelson E. Edwards to Constantinople (Istanbul) to cover the Turkish side of the war.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:08 AM No comments:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

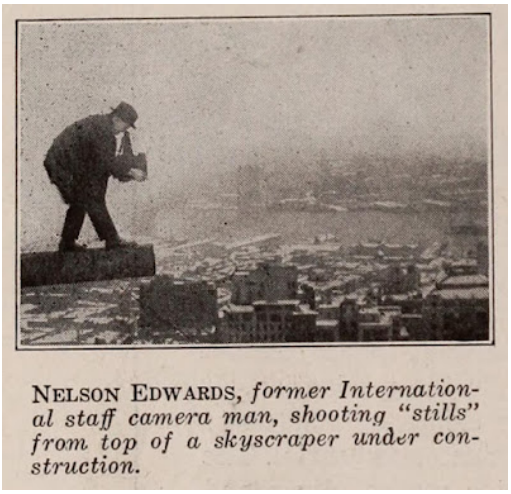
THURSDAY, APRIL 27, 2017

Nelson Edwards and the Newsreels: An American Life

In 2012, authors Cooper Graham and Ron van Dopperen published an article on newsreel pioneer Nelson E. Edwards. Edwards (1887–1954) was among the first newsreel cameramen in American film history. From 1914 he filmed for *Hearst International News Service* and covered the Mexican Revolution. In 1916 he filmed the Turkish and the German side of the World War. He was also chief cameraman for *Fox Newsreel* during the year of its birth, and thereafter a longtime stringer for *Paramount News*.

Christmas postcard from the Edwards' family, 1938

The essay describes Edwards's life and work, as well as some of the background of Hearst's first attempts to get into the newsreel business, based on research in Edwards's personal documents, reports in the press and interviews with his family. Nelson Edwards's film work during World War I also featured in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War* (2014).



Source: *Moving Picture Weekly*, 14 May 1921
Link to high res trade article

Family Collection

During our research on Nelson Edwards we were very fortunate in having contacted Nelson Edwards' s family who were most helpful and provided us with invaluable information from Nelson's personal scrapbooks.

Nelson Edwards was raised in Kansas and many of his relatives are still living in the area. The family background is interesting. He was buried in 1954 at Arlington National Cemetery.

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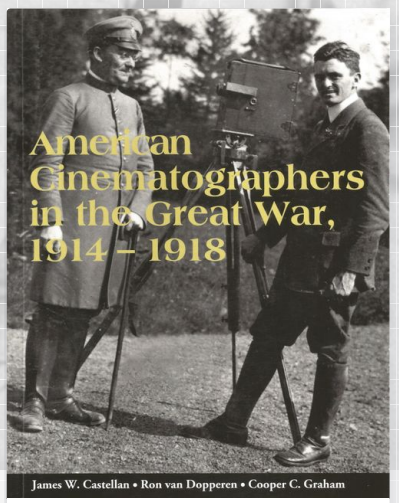

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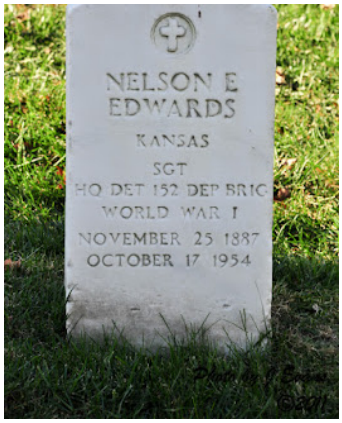


More can be found in this weblog on the Edwards family.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:58 AM No comments:

MONDAY, APRIL 24, 2017

American History TV Shows "On the Firing Line with the Germans" (USA, 1915)

On April 15, C-SPAN3 on American History TV first broadcasted *On the Firing Line with the Germans*. Watch Wilbur Durborough's historic World War I film report on his experiences in wartime Europe and on the Eastern Front while the German army pushed the Russian enemy out of Poland.

Film poster *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (1915)

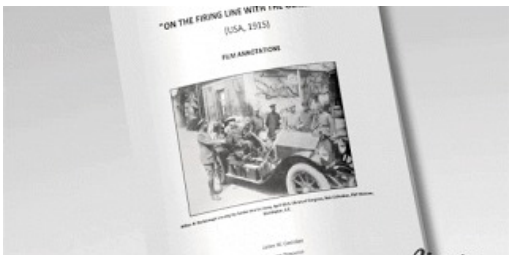
Link to high res image

Durborough's film is the only American World War I feature film that has survived and an invaluable source on World War I film history. Together with his camera operator Irving Ries, Durborough spent five months with the German army. They covered operations both at the home front, in East Prussia and on the Eastern Front where in a gigantic pincer movement the Russian army was driven out of occupied Poland. We have described Durborough's film adventures in more detail in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War* (2014).

Now Available for the Public

Based on research by authors Jim Castellan and Cooper Graham the Library of Congress recently restored Durborough's 1915 war film which is now available for the public after almost one hundred years. Lost and long forgotten, this movie provides us with an extraordinary opportunity to witness the First World War as seen through the lens of an American camera correspondent.

We recently produced a new, extended story on Durborough's photographic work during World War I. You can read this Durborough Film Annotation here.



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Filming the Final Voyage of RMS "Lusitania" (USA, ...
"On the Firing Line with the Germans" - 1915 Film ...
"Fighting the War" (USA, 1916)
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In the TV show by C-SPAN George Willeman and Lynanne Schweighofer tell about their work on restoring this remarkable film. While the movie is shown Cooper Graham and Jim Castellan give comments on the historical background and on how this film was made.

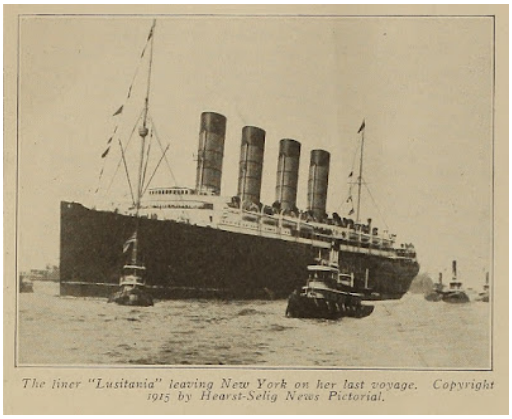
Here is C-SPAN's program on American History TV. Enjoy!

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:44 AM No comments:

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19, 2017

Filming the Final Voyage of RMS "Lusitania" (USA, 1915)

On May 1, 1915, an American cameraman captured the final departure of the RMS *Lusitania*, the British ocean liner en route from New York to Liverpool, England. Of the more than 1,900 passengers and crew members on board, more than 1,100 perished, including over 120 Americans. This unique footage is now at the National Archives in Washington, D.C.



RMS *Lusitania* leaving New York. Scene from *Hearst Selig News Pictorial* No. 38, released on May 12, 1915.
Copied from *Motography*, 22 May 1915
Link to high res image

The original footage comes from a contemporary American news film and shows passengers arriving at the dock and going aboard the ship. The Lusitania's flag is raised. Passengers, including author Elbert Hubbard, pose at the ship's rail. The film also has an interesting scene showing Captain Turner watching the Lusitania's departure. You can see him on film in a very short flash, looking at the camera, perhaps a little startled, when he suddenly notices that he is being covered by a movie man located on the roof of Pier 54, just slightly above him. The ship then turns toward open water and proceeds toward the North Atlantic. Six days later the *Lusitania* was sunk by a German submarine on this fatal voyage.

Historical Value

This unique newsreel film has been preserved because it was edited into a compilation movie by the U.S. Signal Corps in the 1930s as part of a film series on the First World War. Its historical value is undisputed. The film has an intertitle mentioning the approval by the Pennsylvania Board of Censors, so it clearly was released in the United States. But there are no references to a production company. Both *Pathé* and the *Hearst-Selig* newsreel organization at the time claimed to have produced original footage showing the Lusitania's last departure. These films may have been used later on, without the original intertitles. But it seems more likely this film was an independent release.

Scene from the *Lusitania* film (1915)

The trade paper *Moving Picture World* in its issue of May 29, 1915, has two very interesting references to a "special film" on the Lusitania's final departure which was sold on a state-rights basis and that was booked in film theaters across the country. Around May 10, 1915, for instance the film was shown in Detroit and in Kentucky. In addition, the records of the Pennsylvania State Board show there were two independent films that were censored at this time by this State Board: *The Lusitania* produced by Warner, distributed by Crescent, 1 reel, approved 5/20/15, and *The Lusitania*, produced by an unknown company, distributed by Electric, 1 reel, approved 5/17/15. "Warner" may refer to the Warner Brothers, who were already in the movie business in Pennsylvania during the 1910s. In short, the film print at the National Archives appears to be a copy of one of these independent releases, which would also explain why there are no references to a regular newsreel company.

There is some debate whether this film actually shows the last voyage of the *Lusitania*, but Eric Sauder in his weblog on the history of the Lusitania presents a very strong argument in favor of this:

> *""Next to be considered is the well-known film footage which shows Lusitania backing away from Pier 54 in New York that purports to be her 'final departure.' Because of changes in the lifeboat arrangement and various structural alterations made to Lusitania after August of 1914, there can be no doubt that the film footage is from her last few months of service. We also know from existing evidence that it could not have been taken between August and November, 1914. The film clearly shows a light-painted superstructure and not the dark 'war grey' that is plainly seen in the Illustrated London News photos.*
>
> *Since the film must have been taken after November, 1914, a closer examination reveals clues that narrow down the date even further. For example, noting the water level against the pilings under Pier 56, opposite the cameraman, it is definitely very near high tide. A quick check of the tide charts published in The New York Times each day tells us that for Lusitania's monthly sailings between December, 1914, and May, 1915, it was near high tide only twice -- April and May. The December, January, February, and March sailings were closer to low tide.*
>
> *Is it the last voyage? Can't say for sure, but there's a 50/50 chance. I'd sure like to think it is, though...."*

Here is this news film, as shown by C-SPAN3 on American History TV.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 5:52 AM 4 comments:

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 12, 2017

"On the Firing Line with the Germans" - 1915 Film Preview

Next Saturday 10pm & Sunday 4pm ET C-SPAN3 will broadcast *On the Firing Line with the Germans*, a 1915 silent film. Here is a teaser of C-SPAN's upcoming TV show that was posted on the internet today.

This historic World War I film was shot by American journalist Wilbur Durborough and his cameraman Irving Ries. They traveled with the German army to East Prussia and Poland where they covered the offensive on the Eastern

Front. You will learn about how the once-lost film was rediscovered and restored by the Library of Congress.

January 15, 1916 THE MOVING PICTURE WORLD 69

The Greatest Scoop of the War!

On the Firing Line With the Germans

Showing: Storming Novo Georgievsk—Fall of Warsaw—Great Seven-Day Battle—Battlefields from Aeroplane—Von Hindenberg's Great Drive—The Kaiser at the Front—Murderous Machine Gun Fire!

State Rights Selling

Showing: Smashing the Big Forts—Zeppelin Raids on Warsaw—Rain of Russian Shells—Fierce Infantry Assaults—Miles of Battling—Terrific Trench Struggles—Desperate Bayonet Charges!

There are dozens of so-called war pictures, but ours is authentic, consisting of 8500 feet of pulse-quickening scenes taken from automobile and aeroplane at the front by WILBUR H. DORBOROUGH, daring American Press photographer, who accompanied Von Hindenberg's army for seven months.

Ten weeks Chicago, auspices Chicago Daily News.
Five weeks St. Louis, auspices Times.
Two weeks Milwaukee, auspices Free Press.
Two weeks St. Paul, auspices Daily News, and closing for all of the big cities and daily newspapers.

Playing to enormous receipts wherever shown.

The camera does not lie. Mr. Dorborough is seen in at least 30% of the scenes on the film.

CHICAGO TRIBUNE ADMITS:—December 19th, 1915
"THERE ARE WAR PICTURES AND WAR PICTURES, BUT THE BLUE RIBBON GOES TO THOSE TAKEN BY DORBOROUGH."—KITTY KELLY.

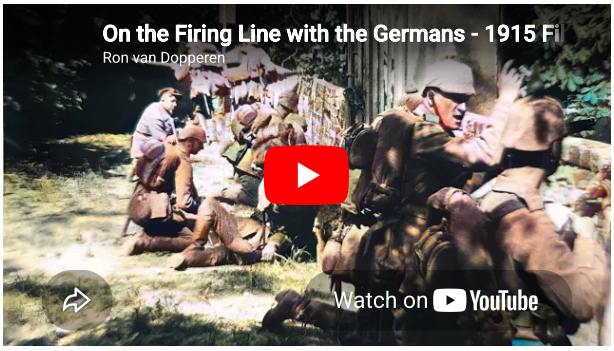
FOR TERMS ADDRESS:

WAR FILM SYNDICATE, 308 Mallers Bldg., Chicago

Ad *On the Firing Line with the Germans*. Source: *Moving Picture World*, 15 January 1916
Link to high res image

Watch the entire film, with commentary by authors Cooper Graham and Jim Castellan who helped reassemble a fascinating World War I movie that had become a jigsaw puzzle of fragments.

For the TV schedule of this show check out this link to C-SPAN's website.



Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 4:42 PM No comments:

MONDAY, APRIL 10, 2017

"Fighting the War" (USA, 1916)

According to the Internet Movie Database, the Mutual Film Corporation in 1916 released *Fighting the War*, a two-reel short produced by Donald C. Thompson. Taken from a 35 mm print and made available for the public domain after 100 years, the movie jumps right into the European war with footage of Algerian and Scottish troops moving to the front lines during the Battle of Verdun.

Donald C. Thompson. Copied from *Moving Picture World*, 6 November 1915

Link to article in trade magazine

The footage runs for 23 minutes and captures troop movements and preparations, munitions handling, equipment transport, large artilliary guns, life in the French trenches, enemy gas measures, observation balloons, French and British aircraft, and actual battle footage on the ground and in the air. Among the surprises for World War I laymen is the French Army's use of compressed air machinery for rapid tunnelling under the German trenches, presumably to lay explosives.

French infantry attack. Scene from *Fighting the War* (1916)

Enigma

A close examination shows that Thompson sold parts of a film to Mutual, which he had marketed before: *War As it Really Is* (1916). Although not all scenes from *Fighting the War* are identical the shots showing French infantry during a trench engagement had been shown before in Thompson's movie *War As It Really Is*. There are no contemporary references in the trade press to Mutual releasing *Fighting the War*. The film also isn't listed in the catalogue of the American Film Institute, so it remains an enigma how this movie was distributed in the United States.

Scenes from Thompson's film *War As It Really Is* (1916) have been shown in an earlier weblog.

Here are some scenes from *Fighting the War*, uploaded on our YouTube channel.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:30 AM 5 comments:

MONDAY, APRIL 3, 2017

Reporting from the Front - Jack Reed (1915)

John Silas "Jack" Reed hardly needs an introduction. Best remembered for his first-hand account of the Bolshevik Revolution, *Ten Days That Shook the World*, Reed died in Russia in 1920 and was buried at the Kremlin Wall Necropolis. His war reports also reveal a tantalazing glimpse on how for the first time in World War I the Germans made official movies at the Western Front.

When the First World War broke out Reed immediately went to Europe as a correspondent of the *Metropolitan Magazine*, visiting England, France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany and Belgium. While in Europe Reed was frustrated by wartime censorship and the difficulty of accessing the front. He spent most of his time drinking with French prostitutes and pursuing an affair with a German woman. The pair went to Berlin in early December 1914. And this was when he got an invitation by the German Foreign Office for a trench tour to the Western Front, together with a number of other American reporters.

Filming the Western Front

This trip to the Western Front by the American journalists was filmed by American cinematographer Albert K. Dawson and an Austrian newsreel cameraman, Hans Theyer. The film project was set up by the German authorities to show the world that the Belgian people were treated

decently, thus trying to disprove the stories on atrocities committed by German soldiers in Belgium. Scenes from this movie were found by the authors while researching our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*. You can read more on this historic film in our latest book.

Jack Reed (1887-1920)

Dawson in Belgium, January/February 1915. The original caption reads: "An American correspondent arrested by a German guard in a Belgian city". The picture was probably staged and may have been taken in Brussels. Colorized picture, copied from the files of the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

Link to original high res image

The Worst Thing in Europe

Although Jack Reed doesn't mention their names, his report has a reference to Dawson and Theyer. Here is an excerpt from the article *The Worst Thing in Europe*, which he published in *The Masses* on March 13, 1915:

> *In a city of Northern France occupied by the Germans, we were met at the train by several officers and the Royal automobiles. The officers, genial, pleasant, rather formal young fellows in the smart Prussian uniform, were to be our guides and hosts in that part of the German front. They spoke English well, as so many of them do; and we were charmed by their friendliness and affability. As we left the station and got into the machines, a group of private soldiers off duty loitered about, looking at us with lazy curiosity. Suddenly one of the officers sprang at them, striking at their throats with his little "swagger stick."*
>
> *"Schweinhunde!" he shouted with sudden ferocity. Be off about your business and don't stare at us!"*
>
> *They fell back silently docilely, before the blows and the curses, and dispersed...*
>
> *Another time a photographer of our party was interrupted, while taking moving pictures, by a sentry with a rifle.*
>
> *"My orders are that no photographs shall be taken here!" said the soldier.*
>
> *The photographer appealed to the Staff Lieutenant who accompanied us.*
>
> *"It's all right," said the officer. "I am Lieutenant Herrmann of the General Staff in Berlin. He has my permission to photograph."*
>
> *The sentry saluted, looked at Herrmann's papers, and withdrew. And I asked the Lieutenant by what right he could countermand a soldier's orders from his own superior.*
>
> *"Because I am that soldier's commanding officer. The fact that I have a Lieutenant's shoulder-straps makes me the superior of every soldier in the army. A German soldier must obey every officer's orders no matter what they may be."*

The full story by Jack Reed on his trip to the Western Front in January 1915 is available for download here.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:21 AM No comments:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

TUESDAY, MARCH 28, 2017

Making Movies in a Minefield under Shell Fire (1915)

In November 1915, American cinematographer Frank E. Kleinschmidt traveled to Trieste where he filmed the operations of the Austrian navy. From Trieste Kleinschmidt flew on a military expedition to the Italian coast and covered a mine-sweeping trip across the Adriatic Sea. Both his film report and a written account on his extraordinary experiences with the Austrian sailors have been preserved.

Frank Kleinschmidt (left) with Austrian sailors near Trieste. Colorized picture courtesy Wichita State University Libraries
Link to original high res image

Kleinschmidt's film adventures during World War I have been described in more detail in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*. He was in 1915 the only neutral American cameraman to film a submarine in action and fly above the Balkan front, taking motion pictures of the attack by the Central Powers on the Serbian capital, Belgrade. Kleinschmidt's camera also recorded some stunning scenes of actual fighting in the trenches on the Eastern Front.

War on Three Fronts (USA, 1916)

Kleinschmidt's film *War on Three Fronts* (USA, 1916) has a scene picturing the seaplane he was in, taking off on a scouting trip from Trieste. Shortly afterwards he accompanied a mine-sweeping operation three miles off the Italian coast. A small flotilla of barges and tugboats was sent out under cover of fog, with only a 75-mm Hotchkiss gun at the bow to protect them against the Italian navy. It was extremely dangerous work. The Austrians were instructed to bomb their own ships as a last line of defence, in case they were under attack. As is shown in his film, the mines were inspected under water with the aid of a special tube and carefully hoisted from the sea.

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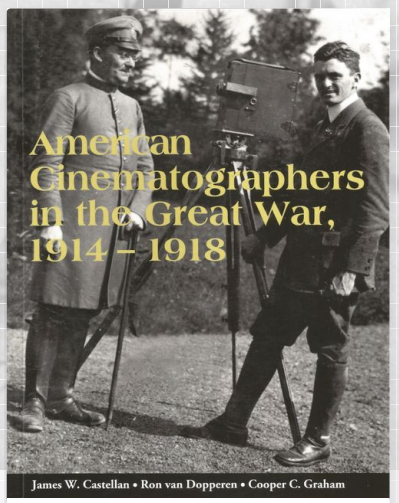

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Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television

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World War I Combat Camera Edwin F. Weigle Found!

Anatomy of an Authentic World War I Combat Scene (1915)

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► 2018 (50)
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Illustration from *St. Louis Post Dispatch,* 29 July 1917

Chase Across the Adriatic Sea

Mine-sweeping in 1915 clearly was a primitive and time-consuming business. Nine mines had just been dealt with when suddenly hell broke loose. Kleinschmidt said he saw a flash of lightning through the fog and the next moment the first Italian shell flew past him. The second impact struck a barge nearby and exploded six mines they had recovered. The Italian navy chased the mine-sweeping party all the way to Trieste and the Austrian sailors had a very close call. Kleinschmidt's account of the escape back across the Adriatic still conveys a sense of terror:

> *"I had just taken my moving picture camera out of its case and set it on the tripod when a shell struck three foot from the launch, raising a big geyser. The columns of water descending douched us and stopped our motor. I had to dry off the sparking plugs while the engineer got busy cranking. Happily the motor sprung right on again, and I got back to the camera and commenced cranking. I tried to keep the No. 10 and the 'San Marco' in the view finder in case they should get hit, and endeavored to get the spouting of the shells. I got about one hundred feet of it, but it is a tame illustration of all the excitement of a race between life and death."*

Unfortunately, the remaining footage of *War on Three Fronts* has no scenes showing their escape across the Adriatic but the film does have the scenes showing how the mines were lifted out of the water.

For a copy of Kleinschmidt's complete report (originally published in *Scientific American* under the title "A Sea Fight in the Adriatic" on July 14, 1917) check out this link.

Here you can see a collection of pictures on Kleinschmidt and his fascinating war film.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:27 AM No comments:

FRIDAY, MARCH 24, 2017

Cooper Graham and Jim Castellan Host American History TV

In April 2017 authors Cooper Graham and Jim Castellan will host a show of *Reel America* on American History TV. The show is set to commemorate the centennial of America's entry into World War I and will be broadcasted nationwide through C-SPAN3's service which is available throughout the United States in 49 million digital cable TV households.

► May (7)
► April (6)
▼ March (5)
Making Movies in a Minefield under Shell Fire (1915)
Cooper Graham and Jim Castellan Host American Hist...
"On Four Battlefronts with the German Army" (USA...
"America Goes Over" (USA, 1927)
"Macht der Bilder" - Film Propaganda in World War I
► February (4)
► January (4)
► 2016 (30)
► 2015 (37)
► 2014 (11)
► 2013 (17)

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Cooper Graham and Jim Castellan on the set for American History TV, watching *On the Firing Line with the Germans*, Wilbur H. Durborough's World War I feature film. Photo courtesy Richard Hall, C-SPAN
Link to low res image

On *Reel America* each weekend archival film is shown that relates to C-SPAN's mission of politics and public affairs. Cable network C-SPAN in 2011 expanded its programs with a new history-based service, airing weekends on C-SPAN3. "American History TV" features programming geared toward history lovers with 48 hours every weekend of people and events that document the American story.

Special Episode: *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (USA, 1915)

For this special episode Cooper and Jim will comment on Wilbur H. Durborough's historic World War I film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (USA,1915)) which has been restored recently by the Library of Congress. While the film is being shown they will provide the audience historical insight and context to the silent film, based on their research of Durborough and his film which enabled the Library of Congress to reconstruct this lost film. This show is also a must-see if you are interested in watching the experiences of an American cameraman in wartime Europe while covering the offensive of the German army on the Eastern Front. Cooper and Jim will be joined in this program by George Willeman and Lynanne Schweighofer from the staff of the Library of Congress, who have been instrumental in restoring Durborough's film.

The program will debut April 15 at 10pm and April 16 at 4pm ET on C-SPAN3's American History TV. The show will also be streamed online on C-SPAN's website which has an extensive video library. We will keep you posted on this TV show.

For the TV schedule of this show check out this link to C-SPAN's website.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:44 AM No comments:

MONDAY, MARCH 20, 2017

"On Four Battlefronts with the German Army" (USA, 1915)

On February 7, 1915, photographer Edwin F. Weigle left Chicago for a six month trip to Europe. Assigned by the *Chicago Tribune* to film the Great War, he visited the Western Front and covered the offensive of the Austro-German army in Russian Poland, as well as the opening rounds of the war around Lake Garda in Italy. His experiences in Italy have been described in a previous weblog.

Left: Capt. Edwin F. Weigle and his wife Florence. Reproduced from *Moving Picture World* 1 January 1921. Right: Portrait of Capt. Weigle taken when he was in the Signal Corps, 1919. Source: *Exhibitor's Trade Review*, 8 January 1921
Link to high res image left
Link to trade paper article right

Weigle returned to America in August 1915. The films that he shot were edited into *The German Side of the War,* a movie that turned out to be so successful that he was soon sent back to Europe by the *Chicago Tribune* to produce a sequel. Weigle's war film, as well as his experiences during World War I, have been described in more detail in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*.

Historical Value

As a result of this trip to Europe, Weigle wrote a report which was published in 1915 as a 27 page booklet under the title *On Four Battlefronts with the German Army*. The booklet is hard to find nowadays, even in research libraries, but we managed to locate a copy in the World War I Library in Stuttgart, Germany, and because of its historical value have uploaded Weigle's report to this weblog.

Weigle's story can be read and downloaded here.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:24 AM No comments:

MONDAY, MARCH 13, 2017

"America Goes Over" (USA, 1927)

To commemorate the centennial of America's entry into the First World War C-SPAN3 on "American History TV" recently broadcasted the silent film *America Goes Over*. This vintage five-reel film provides us with a fascinating example how the Great War was shown on the American movie screen.

There is a great deal of ambiguity surrounding America Goes Over because actually two versions of the film were produced. The original film was produced shortly after the Armistice in November 1918 by the Commitee on Public Information (CPI), America's wartime propaganda agency. The first reel of this film version mentions the CPI and judging from the opening titles appears to have been used mainly as a complilation movie for distribution both in the United States and abroad. Apart from scenes taken by military cameramen of the U.S. Signal Corps this first reel of the film also has footage supplied by other Allied countries.

The original CPI version of *America Goes Over* can be watched here on YouTube.

New Film Release in 1927

In 1927, ten years after the United States had entered World War I, there was a new release of this movie. The U.S. Signal Corps had struck a deal with the Eastman Kodak Company and the original footage was now printed on 16 mm safety stock, which made it possible to distribute the war film directly to customers as a home movie. Apart from the complete five reel film, the customer could also order a separate segment from this historical film. The first reel of this 16 mm version is quite different from the original film which had been released by the CPI nine years earlier. Most of the propaganda content was cut out of the opening intertitles and many scenes not related to the American theater of war in France were deleted.

On December 31, 2016, C-SPAN3 first aired this 1927 home movie version of *America Goes Over* nationwide in the United States. The footage comes from the National Archives in Washington, D.C. and despite the fact that the film is almost one hundred years old the quality of these pictures is astounding. As the film is being shown historians Mitchell Yockelson and Allison Finkelstein provide comments on America's entry into the First World War, both on the political and the military stage.

We have uploaded C-SPAN's showing of *America Goes Over* to our YouTube channel.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 9:19 AM No comments:

MONDAY, MARCH 6, 2017

"Macht der Bilder" - Film Propaganda in World War I

During World War I film for the first time was used as a medium for mass propaganda. But how were these images constructed and exploited for publicity purposes? In June 2014, the Austrian TV documentary *Macht der Bilder* showed how this was done in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

American Cinematographers

The TV program, broadcasted by ORF2, is interesting for several reasons. Most of the World War I footage that was used for this documentary comes from the Austrian Film Museum which has an excellent collection of contemporary film. An analysis of the footage reveals how war scenes sometimes were staged before the camera. Also, although not credited in the TV program, there are some scenes here that were shot by American cinematographers who accompanied the Austro-Hungarian army during the First World War, notably Frank E. Kleinschmidt and Albert K. Dawson.

American cinematographer Frank Kleinschmidt (fifth from left) with Austrian officers, 1915. Colorized picture courtesy Austrian State Archives
Link to original low res image

Parts of the TV program have been uploaded on our YouTube channel, including film scenes showing the battle for Przemyśl on the Eastern Front in the summer of 1915. Some of the footage on Przemyśl was found in a German archive, but during our research for our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War* we also located these films, shot by Albert K. Dawson, in the collection of the Library of Congress in Culpeper, Virginia.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:21 AM No comments:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2017

With the Russian Army in the Caucasus Mountains (1916)

On February 16, 1916, Russian troops captured the fortress town of Erzurum in eastern Turkey. The Russian attack across the Caucasus mountains had taken the Turkish army by great surprise. Erzurum was the lynchpin of Turkish defenses in eastern Anatolia. Its fall was a disaster for the Turks, undermining their whole position in this sector. The hasty retreat from Erzurum allowed the Russians to capture large numbers of guns and military supplies. The Russians also captured several Turkish banners.

Russian soldiers with Turkish banners, captured at Erzurum. Press photograph from New York Public Library

Turkish losses of men were considerable: to the 5,000 men taken prisoner must be added another 10,000 casualties and as many as 10,000 soldiers who had deserted from the army. After the fall of Erzurum, the Russians pushed further into Anatolia, capturing the Black Sea port of Trabzon in April 1916.

Russian war photographer at the front. Copied from *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 7 March 1915

Cameramen of the Skobelev Committee

Not surprisingly, the Russian military success in the Caucasus mountains triggered reporters to cover this campaign. The war was also filmed by Russian cinematographers. At the time, the Skobelev Committee enjoyed a monopoly as the sole organization authorized to make official war films at the Russian front. The institution had little support from the Russian government. The committee's war film department was led by Feliks Karu, who was unfamiliar with this kind of industry, and it lacked human resources. As a result, it had to hire skilled foreign workers from Pathé, such as cameraman Georges Ercole who featured before in this weblog. The Skobelev Committee never obtained the technical and financial means to cover the immense front line, especially as their camera operators were subject to military restrictions on the front.

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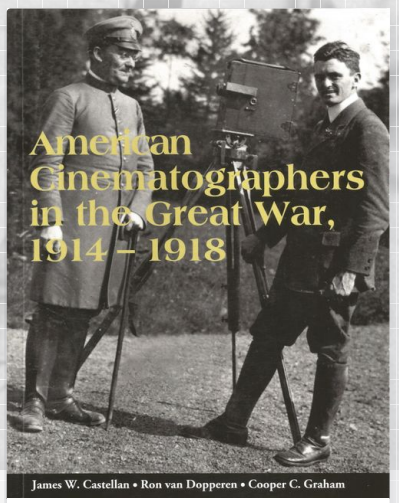

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World War I Combat Camera Edwin F. Weigle Found!

Anatomy of an Authentic World War I Combat Scene (1915)

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► 2018 (50)
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► July (3)
► June (8)

Scene showing Russian soldiers with Turkish banners, captured at Erzurum, filmed by military cameramen of the Russian army

Despite these problems the output by the Skobelev official cameramen still is impressive. According to the Russian State Film & Photo Archives, since the outbreak of the Great War until 1917 the Scobelev Committee produced about 70 newsreels. From 1914 to 1915 cameramen of the Skobelev Committee produced 21 series of the newsreel *Russian Military Chronicle*. The footage for this newsreel was also used for separate films released by Scobelev Committee and other film companies.

The films showing this stage of the Great War at the Caucasus Russian front are very interesting and reveal a remarkable high pictorial quality. We have uploaded scenes from these contemporary Russian war films on our YouTube channel.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:36 AM 4 comments:

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2017

Library of Congress Digitizing World War I Film

In April 2017 the Library of Congress will present a major exhibition to mark the centennial of America's entry into the First World War. As part of this effort, the Library has launched an ambitious project to digitize its vast World War I film collection.

***Under Four Flags*, the third propaganda film by the Commitee on Public Information (1918)**
Link to high res image

The exhibition *Echoes of the Great War* will show a selection of World War I films from the nitrate vaults of the Library of Congress. The Library has an extensive film collection on the Great War. There are hundreds of reels of U.S. Signal Corps film, propaganda films by the Commitee on Public Information, as well as contemporary newsreels. Cooper C. Graham was asked to make an inventory of World War I films in the Library's collection for this digitization project. A former film curator at the Library of Congress, Cooper knows his way around and while researching our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War* had already discovered some spectacular World War I footage in the film collection of the Library of Congress.

► May (7)
► April (6)
► March (5)
▼ February (4)
With the Russian Army in the Caucasus Mountains (1...
Library of Congress Digitizing World War I Film
Found! "The German Curse in Russia" (USA, 1918)
Washington Post: "An American Filmed the German Ar...
► January (4)
► 2016 (30)
► 2015 (37)
► 2014 (11)
► 2013 (17)

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"Poignant shots"

As described in the December 2 issue of the *Library of Congress Gazette* - the Library's staff newsletter - the Library of Congress will digitize nearly 19,000 feet of 35mm nitrate film and 7,200 feet of safety film from its collection related to the Great War. "It was surprising to me how good it was", Cooper said in an interview with the *Gazette*, mentioning Signal Corps footage that he had seen on the American offensive at the Meuse-Argonne in 1918. "I thought it would be very amateurish. They had incredible shots of shellfire and very poignant shots of dead and wounded. I'd always heard that the World War I films avoided showing fatalities and blood and gore. Not at all."

The *Gazette* newsletter also has more about our research on Wilbur H. Durborough's 1915 feature film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* which was restored and digitized recently by the Library of Congress.

Here is a link to the *Gazette* newsletter and the interview with Cooper Graham - Courtesy: Mark Hartsell, Library of Congress.

P.S: In March 2017, the Library of Congress published a magazine on the centennial of America's entry into World War I, which has an abridged version of this article.

You can read and download this magazine here.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:27 AM No comments:

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2017

Found! "The German Curse in Russia" (USA, 1918)

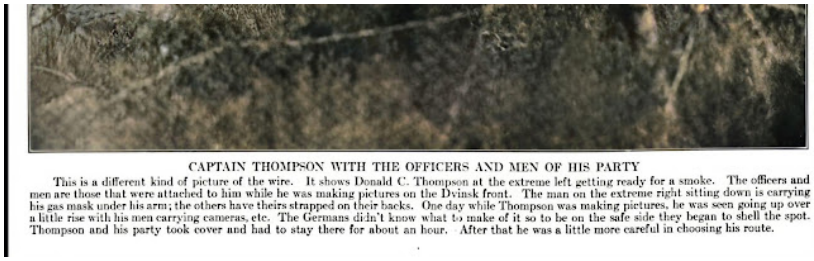
In 1917 American cameraman Donald C. Thompson was one of the few cinematographers to film the Russian Revolution. For many years the authors have been searching for his extraordinary film which covered a major historic event. Now finally we can say that persistence has paid off again.

Film poster *The German Curse in Russia* (USA, 1918)

Link to high res image

When Thompson reached Petrograd in February 1917 the city was the scene of riots and demonstrations against the Tsarist regime. He was on the spot with his film camera when the Petrograd regiments joined the strikers and a provisional government was formed. Thompson also covered the release of prisoners and the defense of the Winter Palace against the Bolsheviks. In the summer of 1917 he was present at the front to film the collapse of the Russian army.

The title of Thompson's film is a good summary of its contents. According to him, the peace that Russia signed when the Bolsheviks took over was no fault of her own, but the result of German political intrigues and propaganda. How he conveyed this message in his film is described in more detail in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*.



CAPTAIN THOMPSON WITH THE OFFICERS AND MEN OF HIS PARTY

This is a different kind of picture of the wire. It shows Donald C. Thompson at the extreme left getting ready for a smoke. The officers and men are those that were attached to him while he was making pictures on the Dvinsk front. The man on the extreme right sitting down is carrying his gas mask under his arm; the others have theirs strapped on their backs. One day while Thompson was making pictures, he was seen going up over a little rise with his men carrying cameras, etc. The Germans didn't know what to make of it so to be on the safe side they began to shell the spot. Thompson and his party took cover and had to stay there for about an hour. After that he was a little more careful in choosing his route.

Thompson (left) at the Russian front, June 1917. Colorized picture copied from his picture book *The Crime of the Twentieth Century* (1918)

After a first run at the Strand Theater in New York *The German Curse in Russia* was released by Pathé in the USA in January 1918 as a five-reel production. We located parts of Thompson's movie in the Axelbank Collection which was used for the 1937 documentary *From Tsar to Lenin*. From 1920, Herman Axelbank assembled an impressive film collection on Russia, gathered from various sources. These included footage shot by several Russian cameramen. Surviving bills of sale show Axelbank also bought film sometime in the 1920s from the Jawitz Motion Picture Library in New York City, a stock film company. Although Pathé controlled distribution rights of Thompson's movie Jawitz somehow had secured Thompson's original footage, showing the events in Petrograd and Moscow during the Russian Revolution. Through Jawitz Axelbank bought Thompson's film (or parts of it) which was used by Axelbank in his edit for the sound documentary *From Tsar to Lenin*.

"Women's Battalions of Death"

By comparing Thompson's photographs taken in Russia, as well as publicity pictures from his movie, we could do a reconstruction of scenes that were originally shot for *The German Curse in Russia*. Of special interest are shots showing the all-female combat units which were formed by the Provisional Government in 1917 in a last-ditch effort to inspire the Russians to continue the war against Germany. These Women's Battalions were filmed extensively by Thompson. Axelbank's films have a scene showing its commander Maria Bochkareva and British suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst, inspecting these young female soldiers. The scene has a full match with Thompson's pictures and was no doubt filmed by Thompson.

Maria Bochkareva and British suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst, inspecting the Women's Battalion. Scene from Thompson's film *The German Curse in Russia* (1918)

Axelbank probably culled many additional scenes from Thompson's film such as sequences showing the burial of the victims of the February Revolution, the demonstrations on May 1, 1917 by the Bolsheviks and the rise of the Kronstadt sailors against the Tsar. Although we have no way of knowing for sure, the World War I battle footage from Axelbank's collection has a remarkable similarity with photographs taken by Thompson on the Dvinsk front in June 1917. These could also very well have been from his film *The German Curse in Russia*.

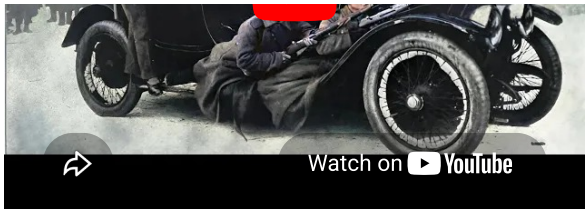
Here is a link to photographs from Thompson's book *The Crime of the Twentieth Century* (1918) on the Russian Revolution.

For some interesting background information on this movie here are also two articles from contemporary film fan magazines:

-Picture Play Magazine - *Filming the Trail of the Serpent* (March 1918)

-Motion Picture Magazine - *The German Curse in Russia* (March 1918)

And now, after almost 100 years, we present you a rough reconstruction of *The German Curse in Russia* - how it may have looked, based on Thompson's still pictures and film scenes that were used by Herman Axelbank. Enjoy!



Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:33 AM 4 comments:

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2017

Washington Post: "An American Filmed the German Army in World War I"

Recently Michael Ruane of the *Washington Post* contacted us about our World War I film research. Intrigued by the Durborough film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (1915), Mike wrote a wonderful article about the making of this movie and the restoration by the Library of Congress.

Here is a copy of Mike's story which was published in the *Washington Post* yesterday, accompanied by this clip from Durborough's World War I film.

An American filmed the German army in WWI — until they became the enemy

By Michael Ruane February 7 at 7:00 AM

The young German soldier has his rifle slung over his shoulder, a half-eaten sandwich in his left hand and a drinking cup in his right.

As he steps to the refreshment window, a woman in a white apron leans over the counter and puts a sprig of flowers in a buttonhole of his uniform. He looks dashing in his spiked helmet and trim mustache, and she glances at him as he moves on.

Then she looks up at the camera.

It is June 1915, 10 months into World War I. The place is Thorn — modern-day

Torun, in northern Poland. And the soldier, whose name and fate are unknown, is headed for the front lines and the killing machine of the Great War.

The moment was captured by a brash, cigar-smoking American filmmaker, Wilbur H. Durborough, and his cameraman, Irving G. Ries, who had motored to the action in a Stutz Bearcat flying an American flag, the word “press” emblazoned on the car.

George Willeman and Lynanne Schweighofer of the Library of Congress look through one of the reels of the film “On the Firing Line With the Germans” at the library’s Packard Campus in Culpeper, Va., on Jan. 10. (Jahi Chikwendiu/The Washington Post)

The scene is part of a little-known documentary about the German army — filmed by Americans — that will be part of an extended exhibit on World War I being assembled by the Library of Congress this year.
April 6 marks the 100th anniversary of the U.S. entry into World War I in 1917.

The library recently restored and digitized the silent film, which is believed to be the only existing, essentially complete American World War I feature-length documentary.

It is an hour and 48 minutes long.

Forgotten for decades, Durborough’s film, called “On the Firing Line With the Germans,” was discovered in a wine cellar of the estate of a Chicago businessman in 1985 and was eventually turned over to the library.

The footage, most of it on old nitrate film, was examined one frame at a time at the library’s audiovisual conservation center in Culpeper, Va.

It has striking scenes of youthful German soldiers before they became the enemy.

Durborough captured them in camp, peeling potatoes, marching through Berlin, recuperating in hospitals, and fighting in apparent and simulated battle scenes. Many of the images are extremely clear, and the faces of the men and women extraordinary.

He also captured scenes of Warsaw’s Jewish ghetto and vivid shots of Allied prisoners of war — British, Russian and French, some still wearing 1860s-style caps and uniforms.

There are shots of the German emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II.

And there are scenes of Durborough — in the Stutz with cigar and driving goggles, shaking hands with German officers, chatting with German soldiers and standing in the trenches.

Indeed, Durborough, like the famous Civil War photographer Mathew Brady, appears in many of the shots he set up. “He just inserts himself everywhere,” said Lynanne Schweighofer, a Library of Congress preservation specialist who helped reassemble the film.

In mid-1915, the war, which lasted from 1914 to 1918, already had claimed tens of thousands of soldiers as Britain, France and Russia were locked in horrific conflict with Germany and its allies.

America was still neutral. And although the Germans held some advantage in the fighting, they felt they were losing the public relations contest, according to a study of the documentary by film scholars James W. Castellan, Ron van Dopperen and Cooper C. Graham.

Meanwhile, in 1914, Durborough, a seasoned newspaper photographer from just outside Dover, Del., had been assigned by Chicago’s Newspaper Enterprise Association, a news service, to photograph the war.

Then 32, Durborough was an ambitious go-getter who had worked for the Philadelphia Inquirer and the Chicago Examiner. He had covered strikes and conventions and had met Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa.

He took the job but asked whether he could shoot moving pictures, too, even though he had little movie experience.

The association declined to pay for filming but said he was free to make a documentary as long as it didn’t interfere with his photo assignment.

Durborough got a group of Chicago business executives to invest. They hired Ries, an experienced cameraman who spoke German, and bought the Bearcat, then one of the fastest cars on the road.

And with a green light from German authorities, who were hungry for good publicity, Durborough, Ries and the Stutz sailed for Europe in early 1915.

Faces and frames that survived

Deep in the film center’s underground vaults, built into a hillside in Culpeper, concrete vault No. 53 holds, among other rare films, 42 reels of Wilbur Durborough’s documentary.

“This is all Durborough,” Geo. Willeman, the nitrate film vault manager, said recently as he gestured to multiple shelves.

The documentary and others made on highly volatile nitrate film are protected by fire alarms, smoke detectors and fire suppression systems. The temperature is kept at 39 degrees, the humidity at 30 percent.

In late 2014, Schweighofer and colleague Valerie Cervantes began poring over the film, guided by research done by Castellan; Graham, a retired Library of Congress film curator; and van Dopperen, who had mapped out a likely sequence of the scenes.

“It had been a dream for many people to get this thing back together,” Willeman said. “Because there’s nothing else like it — an American film about the German army in World War I.”

But many scenes were repetitive or captured on film that was damaged or in poor condition.

“We would . . . see which one was the least deteriorated, had the best ability to be copied, or just the best image content,” Schweighofer said. “What survived in the best shape.”

The task was done using a hand-cranked frame viewer at a spartan “rewind bench” in a special nitrate-film workroom decorated with images of movie stars. One expert would study the scenes, while another took notes on content and condition.

Once the best scenes had been selected, the film was sent to the library’s laboratory to be cleaned, repaired and stabilized. The film was then digitized.

“The thing to me was looking at the faces of the individual soldiers,” Schweighofer said. “You saw the same ones over again. You find yourself wondering what happened to them. And, if they survived this war, did they survive the next war?”

Willeman noted one scene in which German soldiers are obviously singing and enjoying themselves as they gather in front of a railroad car around a man playing an accordion.

“These guys aren’t monsters,” he said. “They’re just guys. They’re like any other army. . . . A majority of these guys, a couple years after the film, were no more. They’re gone.”

Before it was over, World War I killed more than 2 million German soldiers.

Young men transformed

But in June 1915, everybody looks happy at the refreshment stand in Thorn, run by the Vaterländischer Frauenverein, a patriotic women’s group.

In the scene, about 20 minutes into the film, the women at the stand walk among the soldiers, who are heading for the Russian front, handing out flowers and snacks from baskets.

As the young soldier with the mustache moves along, a woman pours a drink into his cup, and another gives him a kiss on the cheek.

He looks about 20, and, after the kiss, disappears from the frames.

He was one of thousands of soldiers Durborough and Ries filmed — most of them young, well-groomed and in clean uniforms, untarnished by combat they had probably not yet experienced.

It is only near the end of the film that the soldiers look grimy, tired and unshaven, in the wake of a battle, and where Durborough has extensive footage of ruined towns and refugees packed into rickety wagons on muddy roads.

And it is there that Durborough stops appearing in the film.

“Suddenly he vanishes,” Willeman said. “But you could see how important this has become to him, because he just goes on and on and on and on to show what’s happened.”

After the war

Durborough and Ries got back to the United States on Sept. 30, 1915, according to Graham, Castellan and van Dopperen's study of the film.

The film was first shown in Milwaukee on Nov. 28, 1915. It began a long run in Chicago that December.

Newspaper ads described it as "The Motion Picture Scoop of the War!" Durborough often appeared at the showings and gave lectures. One promotional poster featured a portrait of the kaiser.

From Chicago, it began runs in theaters across the country. In Philadelphia in early 1916, Durborough arrived in the Stutz, driving it up and down in front of the theater where the film was showing, firing a gun to get attention.

Interest in the film evaporated in 1916 and 1917 as tensions with Germany rose. The United States declared war in April 1917.

During the war, Durborough served as an Army public relations officer.

Afterward, he gave up filmmaking and pursued various jobs in newspapers and public relations.

He was the art director and head of photography at the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin in the mid 1920s. He left the paper in 1926 and launched a series of failed business ventures, including one as a medicine salesman.

In 1931, his house outside Philadelphia went to a sheriff's sale, according to Graham, Castellan and van Dopperen.

Durborough moved to Utah, then California, and died suddenly in San Bernardino in 1946 at age 63.

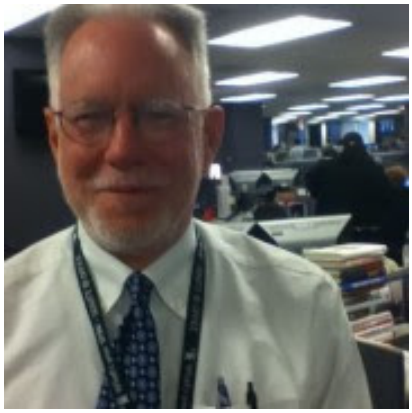
Durborough's grave at Mountain View Cemetery, San Bernardino

Ries, for his part, stayed in the film business as a cinematographer and a special-effects expert. He was nominated, with two others, for an Academy Award for special effects in the 1956 science fiction movie "Forbidden Planet." He died in 1963.

The Stutz wound up in storage in a barn in suburban Cleveland and was sold off at auction during the Depression.

Before he died, Durborough began outlining a novel based on his life.

"You go many places very far away," he wrote. "You go in much danger. No harm comes to you. You will be old man. . . . You have happy life, then unhappy life, then in end happy again."



Mike is a general assignment reporter who also covers Washington institutions and historical topics.

Follow @michaelruane

Courtesy, Washington Post, 7 February 2017/Michael Ruane

P.S: The article from the *Washington Post* has also been published through syndication in many local newspapers throughout the United States. Here is a copy of the *New York Eagle News*, 16 February 2017

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 9:08 AM No comments:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

MONDAY, JANUARY 30, 2017

Breaking the Blockade - "The Sea Raider Möwe" (Germany, 1917)

Playing havoc with British ships crossing the Atlantic, the SMS *Möwe* (Seagull) was the most succesful German sea raider in World War I. Disguised as a neutral cargo ship to enable it to get close to targets, the *Möwe* sunk 40 ships, thus showing that the British did not completely rule the waves and that the Germans were able to break the naval blockade by the Entente. Because of its publicity value the second voyage by the *Möwe* was filmed by members of the crew.

Advertisement for the Möwe film from *Motion Picture News*, 10 April 1920. The picture on the right shows Captain Count Dohna-Scholdien adressing his crew
Link to high res image

Original film Release

Originally released in four reels by the Bild- und Filmamt (BuFA) in May 1917 as *Graf Dohna und seine Möwe*, the movie became one of the most important propaganda films in the First World War. Long considered lost, parts of the *Möwe* film were found recently in the collection of the Dutch Film Museum EYE. A close examination of the footage shows a full match with the ship's log of December 1916 when the *Möwe* in quick succession sank nine ships about 700 miles off Newfoundland. So, the films were taken during the second voyage of the *Möwe* and therefore must have been from the original German movie produced by BuFA. Additional scenes, showing the safe return of the raider to Germany in March 1917 and Admiral Scheer congratulating Captain Count Dohna-Scholdien, have been located by the authors in historical stock footage of Periscope Films.

Scene from the "Möwe" film (1917)

During World War I the film mainly was a commercial success in German theatres. But this changed when three years later the movie was released in the United States. According to Terry Ramsaye in his classic book *A Million and One Nights*, the historical film was found in 1920 by newsreel cameraman Ariel Varges who sent it to America. "It was in the possession of a German secret agent. The agent had an immorata, fair but approachable. She had

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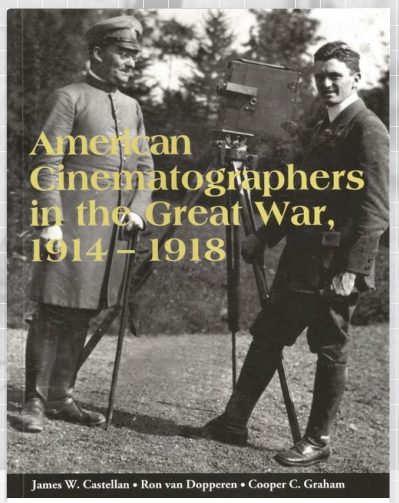

"Pioneering study"

Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television

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Captured on Film by U.S. Cameramen - The Romanov Murder Scene (1918)

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another gallant friend who was a chauffeur, and the chauffeur, naturally, had several friends, all fair. Captain Varges bought a lot of wine and displayed gold money."

The Cruise of the Moewe (USA, 1920)

Although it makes for a good story there is no evidence available to substantiate Ramsaye's account. Varges was in 1920 in Europe for the Hearst newsreels and trade press reports indicate he secured the film in Vienna. Introduced as *The Cruise of the Moewe*, "notorious scourge of the seas", the film was released in April 1920 in four weekly segments through Universal International News. After it had been edited for the newsreels, a two-reel compilation was sold by the Hearst organization in America on a state-rights basis. Parts of this American film version are at the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

Here is a video from our YouTube channel, showing all historical scenes that had been considered lost on the second voyage of the *Möwe*. The Dutch version has also been uploaded on the website of the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA).

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:55 AM 1 comment:

MONDAY, JANUARY 23, 2017

Albert K. Dawson, the "Kaiser's Cameraman"

While researching the online files of the National Archives in Washington, D.C. the authors recently struck gold. In Record Group 165 "American Unofficial Collection of World War I Photographs" we found a fascinating picture file on Albert K. Dawson - the "Kaiser's Cameraman" - who accompanied the German and Austrian army during World War I.

Albert Dawson, directing war films in Galicia, Eastern Front, 1915. Copied from a World War I file now at the National Archives. Colorized picture.
Link to original high res image

This record group is part of the files of the Historical Branch, War Plans Division, War Department General Staff, and was assembled by the Committee on Public Information (CPI), America's propaganda agency during the First World War. As we dug into this photo collection we found a sub file entitled "Enemy Activities - German Propaganda". As it turns out, the U.S. government collected German propaganda pictures and they made a complete file on Dawson who was considered an interesting subject.

Most of these pictures were collected in December 1918. The description is very accurate and shows a lot more information than what must have been in the original photo captions from 1915. Presumably the editor received more information on Dawson's photographic work in wartime Europe, either from Dawson himself or from the FBI who investigated his work and produced a file on him in 1918.

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Amazing Quality

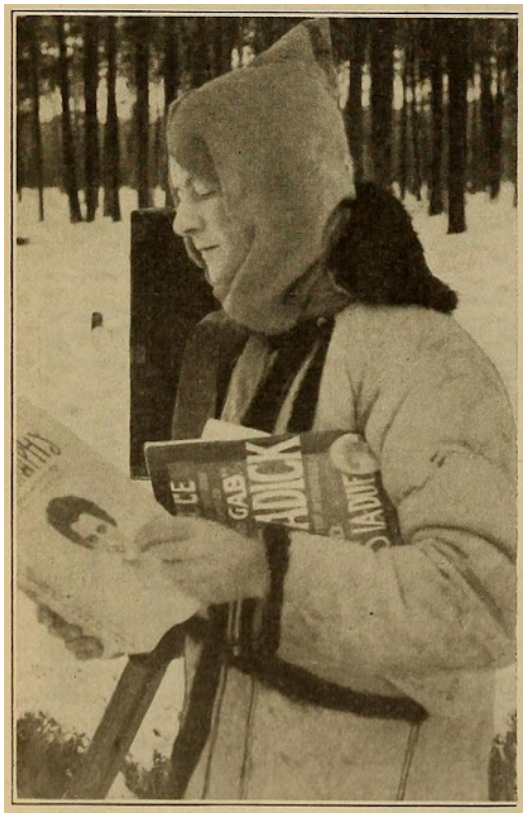
We copied all of these pictures and the quality is simply amazing. There are many new photographs that we had never seen before, notably a picture showing Dawson in the trenches at the western front and another great shot showing him directing a war film in Galicia in the summer of 1915, together with his camera operator John Allen Everets.

Dawson in the trenches at the Western Front, 1915. Colorized picture.
Link to original high res image

During World War I when the United States was still neutral Dawson worked for a movie company that was funded by the Germans, producing a series of war films in America. You can read more about his film adventures in our book *Shooting the Great War: Albert Dawson and the American Correspondent Film Company (2013).*

We uploaded this magnificent collection to our photo channel on Flickr, and you are free to download these pictures here.

Postscript (May 2019): Dawson in Bulgaria



Dawson with the Bulgarian army. Publicity picture from *Motography*, 8 April 1916

Link to high res images from this trade magazine

Dawson not only filmed with the German and Austro-Hungarian army. In the winter of 1915, he also managed to get to Bulgaria, the Central Powers' latest ally. On his return from the front, he was interviewed by the *Continental Times* on his experiences in the Balkans. Here is a download link to this article.

HE MAKES WAR MOVIES

Albert K. Dawson, an American, who has spent many months with the German armies, making moving pictures for the American Correspondent Film Company. This picture was made while he was in the Balkans, wearing the Bulgarian winter costume, of sheepskin with the wool inside. In a letter that accompanied the picture he writes: "Please give my regards to Jimmy Hare. We were pretty close together at one time (in Serbia) but as it happened, were on opposite sides of the line, which makes visiting difficult."

Dawson in the Balkans, wearing a Bulgarian winter outfit. Publicity picture printed in *Leslie's Weekly*, 20 April 1916, with Dawson's personal greetings to veteran war photographer Jimmy Hare

Filming with the Bulgarian army

Information on Dawson's film work with the Bulgarians is scarce, but we were lucky recently to find a press report by *New York Evening Post* journalist Horace Green who accompanied Dawson during this trip. According to Green, he and Dawson were in the Bulgarian capital on Thanksgiving Day November 1915. At the Royal Palace they tried to get an interview with the Bulgarian King Ferdinand. Dawson had brought along his movie camera to make a film of the Royal couple. This was after he had received a police permit, but as it turned out the Bulgarian King and his wife did not pose for Dawson's movie camera. Green mentions both he and Dawson were tailed by an Austrian spy. He also reported Dawson shortly afterwards went to Constantinople (Istanbul).

Here is a download link to Green's report on Dawson's film work in Bulgaria.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:06 AM 1 comment:

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2017

Merl laVoy with the British forces at Salonika (1917)

In an earlier weblog we mentioned our discovery of footage shot by American cinematographer Merl laVoy in 1916 with the French forces at Verdun and the Somme. After the release of this movie, on August 25, 1917, LaVoy left the United States for Serbia. Once again, war film shot by LaVoy for this specfic assignment has been found by the authors, this time in the collection of the Imperial War Museum in London.

Merl laVoy in Edessa, Greece, 1917. Colorized picture.
Link to low res image

As described in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*, LaVoy was a pioneering cameraman who was nicknamed the *Modern Marco Polo* because of his numerous travels across the globe for the newsreels. In 2015, we found four reels from his first film project, *Heroic France*, which was released in the United States in June 1917 through Mutual shortly after the American intervention in the Great War. As it turns out, LaVoy not only worked with the French but for his next photographic assignment he also joined the British forces in Salonika (modern Thessaloniki) in Greece. At the time, Salonika was where the Entente forces had opened a new front, trying to aid the Serbian army that had retreated across the Balkans after the capture of Belgrade in October 1915 by a combined Austro-German army.

British Troops in Salonika

Recently the Imperial War Museum in London has uploaded on the Internet three reels of footage produced by the War Office Cinema Committee in 1917 under the title *British Troops in Salonika -3*. The shotsheet, misnumbered as IWM 135, identifies the cameraman as Merl LaVoy. The Imperial War Museum notes: "There is some evidence that he was briefly employed on a semi-official basis by the British government but he could not have filmed all this material."

The film mainly features British soldiers from the 22nd Division with scenes showing wounded British soldiers on a mule transport, a British Army camp with a bakery, soldiers washing and eating, scenes shot from an airplane over Salonika harbor and General Guillaumat inspecting the British forces.

Here is a video with the scenes credited to LaVoy, taken with the British Expeditionary Army at Salonika. The clip has been uploaded on our YouTube channel for research purposes.

Apart from his films we also discovered on Flickr still pictures, uploaded by the Otis Historical Archives, taken by La Voy in 1917 when he worked with the British forces. Here is a selection:

British army horse litter
Link to low res image

Tommy kitchen camp
Link to low res image

Building church out of packing cases
Link to low res image

The film scenes found at the Imperial War Museum were possibly edited into LaVoy's second World War I movie *Victorious Serbia* (1918) which was shown in the United States at local benefit exhibitions by the Red Cross.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:00 AM No comments:

TUESDAY, JANUARY 3, 2017

Book Review "American Cinematographers in the Great War"

We were pleased to receive a review recently on our book about the American cinematographers of World War I by the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*.

Leen Engelen in her review qualified our book as a "pioneering study" on this subject. Apart from the extensive research both in America and Europe the book review mentions our work on locating and identifying lost World War I films, such as Wilbur H. Durborough's *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (1915).

"One of the particular strengths of this book", Engelen writes, "is that the authors manage to rime extremely detailed accounts on the cameramen and their films with clear insights into the wider contexts, such as the development of the news business in the war years and the Great War as a global propaganda war." As an example, she mentions the chapter on press tycoon William Randolph Hearst and his influence on modern war reporting by sending his cinematographers to Europe.

Adventure Stories

"Accounts of American correspondents hiding from bombshells in the coal cellar of an Antwerp townhouse or secretely filming at a Marxist demonstration in Petrograd read as exciting boys' fiction adventure stories of young men with cameras, left to their own devices and inventiveness on the battlefields around the world", the review concludes.

Thank you for this review! Like the main characters that we described we also felt we were on a great adventure while researching and writing this book. These American cameramen were among the first film correspondents and the Great War served as a strong driving force to innovate the media on a completely new scale and level. This was something people couldn't have imagined a few years before the outbreak of war in 1914. For the first time in modern history wars were being extensively filmed.

The review by the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television* (December 2016) can be read and downloaded here.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:47 AM No comments:

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Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2016

Advertising War Films with the Magic Lantern

In October 2016, the authors found a remarkable glass slide of Wilbur H. Durborough's World War I feature film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (USA, 1915). Advertised as "the greatest scoop of the war", the picture sheds some new light on how war films were promoted in the American theaters during the First World War.

Unknown photographer. Greatest Scoop of the War: *On the Firing Line with the Germans*, 1915. From the collection of the International Center of Photography. Gift of Ray F. Tomorowitz in memory of Joseph R. Tomorowitz, 2011

Ever since movies were first shown on the screen glass slides were an integral part of the early cinema experience. The first theaters were often equipped with only one projector and films were usually one or two-reelers. While changing films the audience needed to be entertained and because of this slides were projected, displaying lyrics and illustrations of popular songs. By the 1910s theaters also used the "Magic Lantern" to project slides on the screen, showing upcoming films. These slides were often referred to as “lantern” slides because of their origin in pre-cinema magic lantern shows.

Glass slides sent to a movie theater in Green Bay, Wisconsin, in 1917 to show between films giving current news on events involving World War I

The glass slide advertising Durborough's film is of a specific type and appears to have been part of a promotional kit that was distributed to exhibitors to advertise his war film. The Durborough film slide consist of two panes of glass held closely together. The inside surface of the glass has been imprinted with a positive image of the coming attraction, showing Kaiser Wilhelm II and Field Marshal von Hindenburg. There is a solid black border on both panes on the outside of the image. The two panes measure exactly 3 1/4” by 4”, and they are held together with pieces of black tape on the edges of the two panes. Usually there is a blank border left inside this type of slide for listing local show days. The “black tape” type was mostly made from the earliest silents through the mid-1930s.

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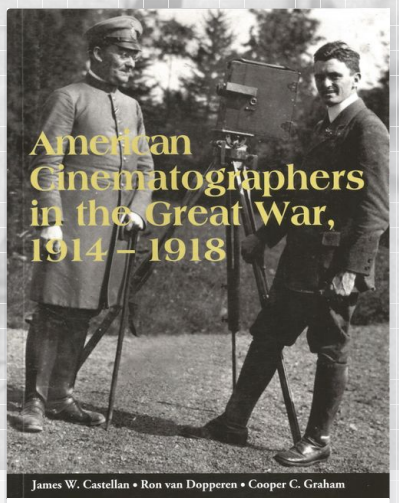

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Anatomy of an Authentic World War I Combat Scene (1915)

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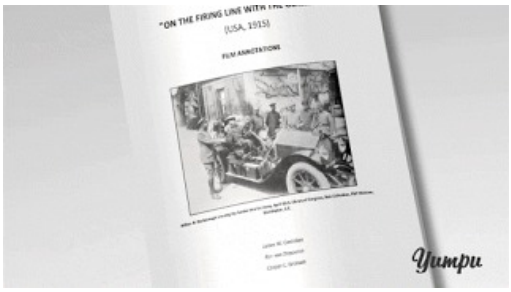
Mystery

We found the glass slide on the website of the International Center of Photography (ICP) in New York City and contacted Claartje van Dijk, the assistant curator. The ICP, she said, unfortunately doesn't have any information other than that this is a lantern slide taken by an unidentified photographer. It was donated in 2011 to the International Center of Photography. So, while the provenance of this glass slide remains a mystery, we do get a interesting glimpse how Durborough's film was advertised in the American theaters during World War I.

Based on our research Durborough's film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (1915) last year has been restored by the Library of Congress and was shown again for the first time since 1917 at the Pordenone Festival of Silent Film in October 2015. The Library of Congress announced the online release of Durborough's restored World War I film in this weblog on November 11, 2016.

We recently prepared a new, extended story on Durborough's photographic work during World War I. You can read this *Durborough Film Annotation* here.



Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:37 AM 1 comment:

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2016

"The Battle of Alost" (GB/USA 1914)

On September 27, 1914, the Belgian city of Aalst (Alost) was the scene of heavy fighting. In a desperate attempt to push the invading Germans back, Belgian soldiers defended the banks of the river Dender. On the spot was cinematographer Arthur Radclyffe Dugmore who made a remarkable film of the battle of Alost.

Long considered lost, parts of the film were found recently by Dirk Meert in the German Federal Archives. The credit for identifying the cameraman goes to Walter De Swaef, co-author of a book on Aalst at the outbreak of the Great War. Walter did a terrific job researching the events in Aalst when local citizens were brutally executed by the German army.

The Cameraman

Arthur R. Dugmore was an Irish-born pioneering American naturalist and wildlife photographer who took part in photo-safaris in Newfoundland and Kenya. He also studied painting at the Bell' Arte in Naples and at the Academy of Design in New York. In 1914, Dugmore went to Belgium and filmed the invasion of this country by the German army. According to a tradepaper article in *Moving Picture World*, he managed to gain access to the frontline because his brother had a commission in the British army.

Arthur Dugmore (1870-1955)

The Movie

Dugmore later described his experiences as a frontline cameraman in his book *When the Somme Ran Red*. Together with another American journalist, Arthur Gleason, he reached Alost on Sunday, September 27, 1914. After having been declared crazy by the local military commander for trying to film the fighting, he joined a company of Belgian soldiers who had set up a barricade in the streets. Nothing much was happening at this moment, and Dugmore suggested staging a movie scene. In the surviving footage we see some of these soldiers supposedly falling dead behind a barricade with a machine gun car in the background. This barricade actually was built in order to film Dugmore's scene.

Released as *The Battle of Alost* in Great Britain, Canada and Australia the movie was a great commercial success. In the United States the film was released by the Lubin Company in November 1914. An important reason for the popular interest abroad is that the film tied in quite closely with the public feelings at the time. In belligerent as well as neutral countries there was a huge amount of sympathy for the suffering of the Belgians who were overrun by the German army.

Up until his final years when he wrote his autobiography Dugmore insisted his film coverage during World War I was authentic. However, as Walter De Swaef's research clearly shows, the movie on the battle of Aalst was a fake. In the book Walter produces several witnesses who described how Dugmore elaborated on the truth. One should not forget that journalism at the time already was commercialized. Also, reporters wanted to get the picture and in order to film the war scenes were frequently staged.

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Scene from *The Battle of Alost* (1914)

Lost Footage

In the meantime, Walter De Swaef continues his impressive research on films that were taken around Aalst during World War I. The American trade press indicates Dugmore's film was widely released by the Lubin Company nationwide, including scenes that have not been found so far, showing Belgian cavalry and artillery passing through Aalst, the armored motor cars and Red Cross wagons in the city. Hopefully more scenes shot by Dugmore may be found either in the European or American film archives.

Apart from a description of Dugmore's film Walter De Swaef's and Peter D' haeseleer's book *Duitse Oorlogsgruwel in Aalst* (ISBN 978908232650) contains some interesting photographs taken from Dugmore's movie. Here you see an illustration that was used in a contemporary French postcard. Note the damage that was added to the window shops by applying a photo retouching job for dramatic purposes.

Streetfighting in Alost. French postcard. Courtesy Peter d' haeseleer.

In 1916 during the battle of the Somme Dugmore was gassed but he survived the war. He remained active throughout his life as a painter and photographer. By 1931 he was known for his films *The Wonderland of Big Game* and *The Vast Sudan* as well as his many books on wild animals.

Here is an interview by Lowell Thomas from the *Oakland Tribune* (January 5, 1930) on Dugmore's experiences as a cameraman during World War I in Belgium. ***(pay site)***

We have uploaded the surviving footage shot by Dugmore in the streets of Aalst to our YouTube channel.

With special thanks to Walter De Swaef for his input on this weblog.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:42 AM 3 comments:

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Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2016

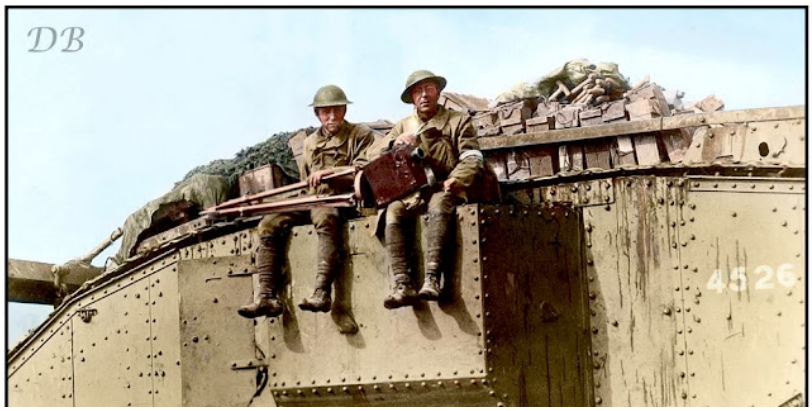
U.S. Signal Corps Training (1918)

Harry Kidd recently contacted us about a remarkable 4 reel historical film at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. The footage shows American soldiers of the U.S. Signal Corps during World War I. The U.S. Army Signal Corps was designated as the sole official agency responsible for obtaining photographic coverage of America's participation in the Great War.

Nieuport (Berquet bombing) aeroplane, French model, and Lt. Clime ready for photographic flight. Issoudon, France, 23 May 1918. Colorized Signal Corps photograph from Harry Kidd's collection on Flickr.
Link to original high res image

"Historical Series"

The footage was originally shot in 1918 and edited in 1936 for the "Historical Series" of the Signal Corps. We have shown Signal Corps films before in a previous weblog. This footage has new scenes that were not available to the public domain until recently. The final two reels are particularly interesting because these cover the photographic activities by the Signal Corps. Reel 3 features a parade at Columbia University in New York City where the Military School of Cinematography was located during World War I. Reel 4 shows how stereoscopic slides were prepared at Cornell University. Here the Signal Corps soldiers were trained in aerial photography. The instruction film shows how lantern slides are made and placed in an aerial camera. Aerial photos are shot, developed, and made into an aerial map.



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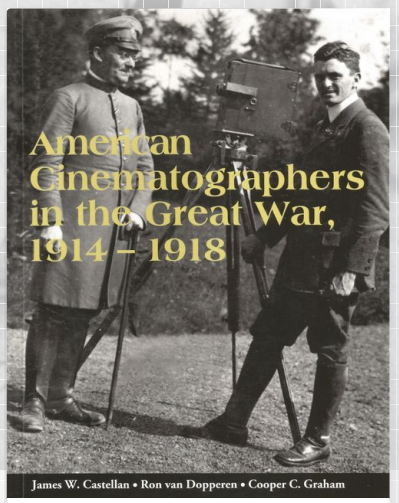

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U.S. Signal Corps Training (1918)
Now Online! "On the Firing Line with the Germans" ...

Sgt. Morris and Pvt. Persse, U.S Signal Corps cameramen, going into battle lines on a British supply tank between Villeret and Bellicourt in France. September 29, 1918. Source: WW1 Colourised Photos, Facebook

Link to original high res photograph, courtesy Harry Kidd

Here is also a link to Harry Kidd's outstanding collection of pictures on Flickr, showing the activities by the U.S. Signal Corps photographers of the First World War.

We have uploaded reels 3 and 4 of this film to our YouTube channel.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:23 AM 3 comments:

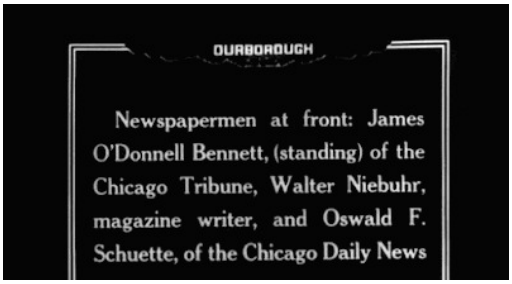
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2016

Now Online! "On the Firing Line with the Germans" (USA, 1915)

With a perfect sense of timing the Library of Congress has released the digitally restored version of Wilbur H. Durborough's World War I feature film *On the Firing Line with the Germans*. The web launch of this movie was set for Friday November 11, 2016: Veterans Day. An original Great War film from 1915 is now back on the screen!

Durborough and Ries in their Stutz Bearcat roadster heading for the Great War. Copied from *Automobile*, 28 November 1915
Link to low res image

After one hundred years this breathtaking war film on Durborough's film adventures with the German army during the Great War can be seen again in all of its former splendor. Mike Mashon, Head of the Moving Image Section at the Library of Congress, on November 11 announced the online release in the National Audio-Visual Conservation Blog *Now See Hear!* For the readers of the weblog we published a short introduction on Durborough's historic film.



Fritz Arno Wagner and the Great War
Packard Campus Theater Shows "On the Firing Line w...
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Scene from *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (1915)

As Mike noted Library staff members George Willeman and Lynanne Schweighofer did a terrific job in selecting the best surviving scenes from among 32 reels of nitrate film, nine reels of paper print fragments, and supplemental 35mm from the National Archives, then assembling the digital files created from them to present a complete version of the film as it premiered in November 1915. So, here is a big **THANK YOU!** to Mike, George, Lynanne and their colleagues!

New Extended Story

To coincide with this online release the authors prepared an extended story on the making of Durborough's war film. Based on our previous book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*, we added new information that was found earlier this year in the German archives as well as in the American and Dutch newspapers. In this new edition we describe how Durborough and his camera operator Ries went to East-Prussia in June 1915, where they filmed the devastating effects of the invasion by the Russian army. We also found out how Durborough with his typical boldness filmed Field Marshal von Hindenburg during this exciting trip to the Eastern Front. The Film Annotation has been illustrated with numerous new pictures on Durborough's photographic work during the First World War.

The *On the Firing Line with the Germans* Film Annotation is now available for download here.

You can also read the story here on the digital publication platform Yumpu

We have uploaded the restored Durborough film to our YouTube channel. Enjoy!

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:25 AM No comments:

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2016

Fritz Arno Wagner and the Great War

Credited as cinematographer for *Nosferatu* and *Westfront 1918*, Fritz Arno Wagner hardly needs an introduction. During the 1920s, Wagner was among Germany's most in-demand directors of photography and played a key role in the expressionist movement, working with some of his country's finest directors, including Murnau and Lang. His life and work during the First World War however has remained somewhat underexposed.

Filming the Mexican Revolution

Interested in cinematography from an early age, Wagner became a newsreel cameraman in 1913 and was stationed in New York for *Pathé Weekly* where he reported on the Mexican Revolution. This became his first taste of real warfare. In March 1914, Pathé had contracted Wagner to bring back to the United States pictures of Victoriano Huerta and his army. Huerta paraded his army in front of Wagner's camera. "He censored the films, had me cut out all the parts favourable to the Federals and then ordered the 'Salon Rojo' to show them as advertising for the troops", Wagner later reported for the trade paper *Moving Picture World*.

Fritz Arno Wagner, 1915, copied from *Leslie's Weekly*
Link to low res image

Scene from Nosferatu (1922), filmed by Wagner

At the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Wagner returned to Germany to enlist for the army while still reportedly filming war scenes. Wagner was mentioned in the publicity by the American Correspondent Film Company as one of their film reporters working at the German front, together with Albert K. Dawson, Edward Lyell Fox and Charles d'Emery. As our research has shown, Dawson and Fox were indeed on the payroll of this film company. But we found no record on Wagner in the files of the German Foreign Office or the German Foreign Propaganda Agency, the Zentralstelle für Auslandsdienst. Apparently, his name was thrown in for publicity purposes anyway.

June 26, 1915. MOTION PICTURE NEWS

American Correspondent Film Enters News Field

Company, Under the Guidance of M. B. Claussen, Is Organized to Supply a Quick Service of Political, Industrial and Educational Topics to Dailies and Film Organizations

M. B. CLAUSSEN, president of the American Correspondent Film company, at 30 East Forty-second street, New York City, recently outlined the purposes of his company.

"I feel that the cinematographic newspaper will have in not so remote a future ing who are interested themselves in putting cinematographic news before the public. Our correspondents are officially admitted to the German and Austro-Hungarian war fronts. One of our correspondents, A. K. Dawson, is now on the Italian frontier. Another correspondent,

FRITZ A. WAGNER — EDWARD LYELL FOX AND SOME OF HIS ASSOCIATES — CHARLES D'EMERY

Trade article mentioning Wagner (left) working for the American Correspondent Film Company
Link to trade paper article

Wagner had a short but painful episode during the First World War when he volunteered for his country's elite cavalry corps, the German Husars. After ten weeks he met with an accident in which his arm was so severely injured that he had to be discharged.

An interesting report written by Wagner for the American magazine *Leslie's Weekly* on his experiences in the German cavalry can be read here.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:18 AM No comments:

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2016

Packard Campus Theater Shows "On the Firing Line with the Germans" (USA, 1915)

On November 16, the Packard Campus Theater in Culpeper, Virginia, will show W.H. Durborough's World War I feature film *On the Firing Line with the Germans*. A must-see for anyone interested in World War I film history!

American reporters on the Eastern Front, 1915. Film frame from Durborough's war movie. Colorized reproduction.
Link to original high res image

Last year the Library of Congress restored Durborough's war film which was first shown again on the screen since 1917 at the Silent Film Festival in Pordenone, Italy.

Here is the program announcement of this special film show at the Packard Film Theater:

Wednesday, November 16 (7:30 p.m.)

ON THE FIRING LINE WITH THE GERMANS (War Film Syndicate Company, 1915)

In 1915, newsreel director and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough spent seven months with the German army through Germany and Poland and shot 16,000 feet of film. Edited to nine reels and released in November of 1915, it is the only existing, essentially complete World War I feature-length documentary. Thanks to the work of Cooper C. Graham and Jim Castellan who spent years reviewing and logging each reel of known Durborough film at the Library of Congress's nitrate film vaults and the National Archives film collection, the Library of Congress Film Preservation Lab has restored the documentary which had its premier screening at the Pordenone, Italy Silent Film Festival in 2015. In addition to the historic and valuable material shot on the battlefields, the film has rare footage showing the first attempt by the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom to stop the Great War. Stephen Horne will provide live musical accompaniment.

Black & white, 109 minutes

For more information on this film show check out this website

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:31 AM No comments:

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Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

MONDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2016

Wolfgang Filzinger - War Front Cameraman, 1914-1918

As a result of the centennial of the First World War, European archives have digitized over 3.000 contemporary films on the Great War on the European Film Gateway. The webportal is a true bonanza for film history fans all over the world. As part of this project, the German Film Institute uploaded a remarkable collection on war front cameraman Wolfgang Filzinger.

Filzinger and his Ernemann- A movie camera, March 1915. Note the short tripod

Link to low res image

Born in Dresden in 1889, Filzinger became involved in building the first Pathé movie theatre in Paris in 1911. When war broke out in 1914 he was assigned as a cinematographer for one of the private film companies, presumably Messter, to report on the war. Filzinger left three photo albums that show him and his film team at the western front. He also reported on his film work in the German trade papers. The collection is of great importance to World War I film history.

Cloaking Device

Throughout the war Filzinger cranked an Ernemann-A camera which was built in Dresden. In his photo album there is a picture showing him at the Pontfaverger airfield, France, in March 1915, using a short tripod. This handy tripod came into use a lot, as it allowed filming in recumbent positions which reduced the danger of Filzinger becoming a target. In his articles Filzinger also reported on cloaking devices he invented and employed to shelter himself from both German soldiers staring curiously into the camera, thus destroying the aura of authenticity, as well as enemies spotting him. Other safety measures he employed included a system of mirrors he installed in dug-outs so he could film without risk.

Filzinger in the trenches at the Western Front

Link to low res image

There is a sketch by Filzinger showing this cloaking device in his article for *Lichtbild-Bühne.* "In order to shoot in a

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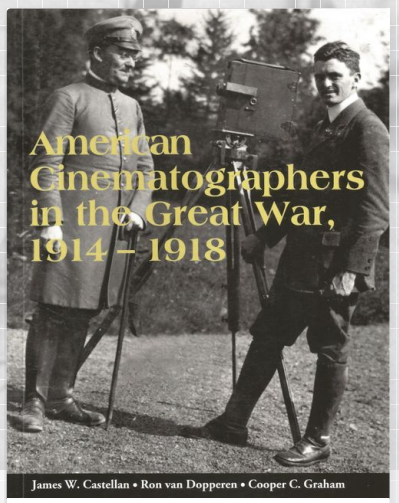

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Wolfgang Filzinger - War Front Cameraman, 1914-1918

trench", he reported, "you have to be familiar with the conditions. It is not easy to find a suitable spot in a trench. It is best to film through an embrasure or from an observation stand. The cranking of the camera is a dangerous business, as it can easily happen that one is hit by shrapnel when shells detonate nearby."

Filzinger's images show how the size and weight of the camera and tripods restricted the work of the operator, which is why action often had to be captured from a fixed viewpoint in the distance using a wide angle. This wide angle would also allow operators to capture spectacular events or detonations, as one was always unsure where exactly they would occur. As a consequence the aesthetic quality of such images in terms of composition or depth of field was often mediocre. It is known from his reports that Filzinger tried to improve the visual quality of his footage by working on the diaphragm control of his object lens.

After the war Filzinger continued his work in the film sector and is known mostly for conducting early sound film experiments with the Swedish film pioneer Sven Berglund. He died in 1951.

Filzinger's original manuscript in German on his experiences filming the Great War can be downloaded and read here.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:52 AM 4 comments:

MONDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2016

Lost & Found: The German Navy Filmed by Nelson E. Edwards (1916)

While doing research at the Military Archives in Freiburg, Germany, authors Cooper C. Graham and Ron van Dopperen in February 2016 found a complete list of movie scenes shot by American cinematographer Nelson E. Edwards, showing the German Navy and close ups of Admiral Scheer and von Hipper. The historical footage was taken in June 1916, shortly after the battle of Jutland. A month before our research trip to Freiburg we also identified some of these scenes online.

Nelson Edwards, filming Admiral von Hipper, June 1916. From *American Cinematographers in the Great War* (2014). Colorized photograph, courtesy Wiegman family
Link to original high res image

This discovery makes it possible for the first time to reconstruct how Edwards filmed the aftermath of the largest naval battle in World War I and how these scenes were shown in the American and German movie theaters in the summer of 1916.

Edwards's film work in wartime Germany has been described in more detail in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War.* He ranked among the first, pioneering newsreel cameramen in American film history. From 1914 Edwards filmed for *Hearst International News Service* and covered the Mexican Revolution. In 1916 he filmed the Turkish and the German side of the World War. He was also chief cameraman for *Fox Newsreel* during the year of its birth, and thereafter a longtime stringer for *Paramount News*.

German Fleet Photographed
International Films Are First

Lost & Found: The German Navy Filmed by Nelson E. ...

► September (2)
► August (3)
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► May (2)
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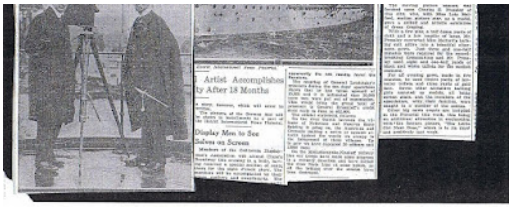

Clippings from Edwards' personal collection on his film work with the German Navy. Courtesy Wiegman family

The Battle of Jutland

When Edwards shot these naval scenes the Germans were in a celebratory mood. They had just fought the battle of Jutland against the British Navy, and although the outcome was indecisive the Germans claimed victory because they had destroyed more enemy ships. To celebrate the event Edwards was invited by the German naval publicity bureau to visit the fleet. The list that we found was cleared on June 29, 1916, by Captain Hans Wittman, a naval publicity officer. Wittman must have been impressed by Edwards' film work because earlier in 1916 he had struck a deal with the German foreign propaganda agency - the *Zentralstelle für Auslandsdienst* - to use films shot by Edwards of the Turkish army.

The list that was cleared by Wittman has a total of 35 movie scenes all showing the German Navy. The footage by Edwards has a length of 1400 feet. Edwards filmed Admiral Scheer's flagship, as well as the officers of the German Naval High Command, who were proudly posing before his movie camera. In one of the scenes can be seen a young officer, Erich Raeder. He served as Admiral von Hipper's chief of staff in 1916, and during the first part of the Second World War was Hitler's top naval commander.

Scene from one of Edwards' films: Admiral von Hipper adressing his men

Edwards also filmed numerous battle ships on the high sea. Those listed by name are the battleships *Westfalen* that destroyed six British torpedo boats, as well as the *Kaiser Wilhelm II*. He also filmed German torpedo boat destroyers in action, sailors signalling to other ships, excercises on board the German fleet and the daily life of the German sailors. In America Edwards' newsreel films were released in the movie theaters in August 1916.

Scenes Found by the Authors

The scenes that we could identify on the list and that were retrieved online are numbers 13, 14, 17 and 18. These show Admiral von Hipper and his staff, as well as Admiral Scheer visiting his flag ship *Friedrich der Grosse*. The intertitle introducing the scene showing Scheer boarding the ship - a very short flash on film - has a reference to the *Hearst International News Pictorial*, the company Edwards worked for and further evidence that he shot these scenes. The footage is on 35 mm and the original negatives are from the Grinberg Collection. A print positive was bought for stock purposes by Getty Images. The original footage from Grinberg was also used by the BBC in episode 14 of the *Great War* series (1964).

We have uploaded a research copy of the film clip on our YouTube channel, including the film scenes shot by Edwards that were used by the BBC in the 1960s.

The list from the Military Archives in Freiburg, describing the naval scenes taken by Edwards, can be read and downloaded here.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:15 AM No comments:

ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2016

Ariel Varges and his Moy & Bastie Movie Camera (1916)

From 1916 newsreel cameraman Ariel Varges was attached to the British army. He filmed the operations of the Expeditionary Force at Salonika (Thessaloniki), Greece, and later covered the war in the Middle East and Mesopotamia. Varges previously featured in a chapter on the American cameramen with the Entente in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*.

Ariel Varges in the trenches at Salonika, 1916. Colorized picture
Link to low res image

'Simple - Efficient - Reliable'

Because of his work with the British during World War I the Imperial War Museum has a remarkable collection of pictures taken by Varges. Of special interest are two photographs, showing Varges with his motion picture camera at the frontline. Varges cranked a Moy & Bastie, a model that was first used in 1909 and became very popular in the film industry. In fact, the first regular "Hollywood" film was shot with a Moy & Bastie. Described in their catalogue as 'Simple - Efficient - Reliable', the Moy & Bastie was a professional hand crank 35 mm motion picture camera in the English 'upright style'. The box was constructed from mahogany and had two internal 400 foot film magazines. Focusing was achieved by viewing the image through the film via a tube from the rear. The camera utilized a unique film transport featuring the 'drunken screw' movement to achieve film pull-down. The Moy & Bastie camera was well known for its impressive chain driven movement and brass gear wheels.

Varges must have followed army regulations when he used this movie camera because the Moy & Bastie was the official model for cinematographers who were attached to the British army. Malins and McDowell used the same type of camera when they shot *The Battle of the Somme* (1916).

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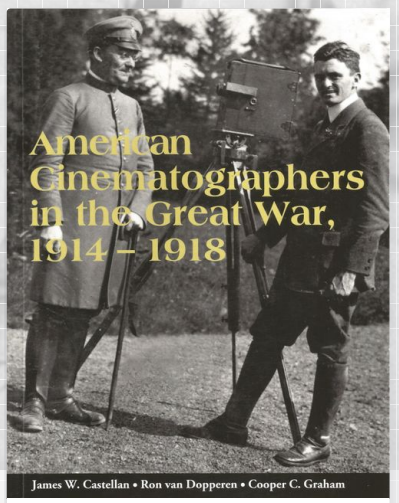

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Anatomy of an Authentic World War I Combat Scene (1915)

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► 2018 (50)
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Ariel Varges and his Moy & Bastie Movie Camera

Captain Varges (right) with assistant in forward trenches at the front in Mesopotamia, 1917
Link to low res image

Apart from the information on the type of camera, the two pictures are also interesting because the photographs show the dangers of filming at the firing line. To protect himself Varges used an armour plate that was set up in front of his camera.

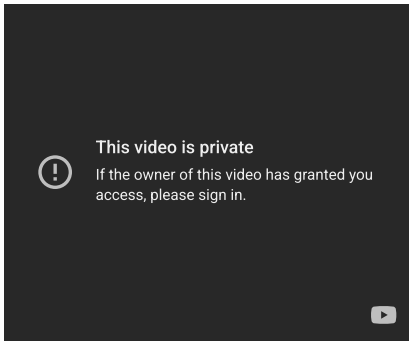
Varges featured before in this weblog. Here is a link to an earlier story.

Also, here is a YouTube video, explaining how the movie camera was operated.

Postscript January 27, 2017:

Battle of the Somme Movie Camera on Display

A Moy & Bastie film camera which is thought to have been used to shoot the famous *Battle of the Somme* film from 1916 was on display last year at the Imperial War Museum. The camera is in the collection of the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum at the University of Exeter but was loaned to the Imperial War Museum for their exhibition *Real to Reel: A Century of War Movies.* The camera is signed inside one of the magazines by the great wartime cameraman J.B McDowell, who filmed some of the combat sequences that make up the film.



Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:20 AM 1 comment:

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2016

Shooting War - The U.S. Signal Corps in France

In April 1917, the U.S. Army Signal Corps was designated as the sole official agency responsible for obtaining photographic coverage of America's participation in the Great War. The stated purpose of still and motion-picture film documentation was for use in propaganda and in scientific and military reconnaissance, but it was principally for the production of a pictorial history of the conflict.

(1916)
Shooting War - The U.S. Signal Corps in France
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Lt. Edwin F. Weigle (left), Photographic Officer U.S. Signal Corps, with the 35th Division in France, 1918/1919.
Colorized photo courtesy Cooper C. Graham
Link to high res image

As described in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*, the expansion of the Signal Corps into the official pictorial coverage of the First World War was slow and painful. The army's main interest in motion pictures was for training and observation. The idea of making suitable pictures at the western front to boost morale in the USA was of secondary interest. Lacking cameramen and the proper equipment it took almost a year before the first motion pictures from France were ready for exhibition in the United States.

Signal Corps film (1919) from the CBS Collection at the National Archives

By the end of July 1917, a laboratory was secured by the Signal Corps in Paris for developing and printing both motion and still pictures. This laboratory served until February 1918, when photographic operations were transferred to a larger location in Vincennes near Paris. Starting with 25 men, the Photographic Section grew in strength to 92 officers and 498 enlisted men by the time of the Armistice in November 1918. An operational photographic unit consisted of one motion-picture cameraman and one still-picture photographer, with an appropriate number of assistants. One photographic unit was assigned to each of the American divisions in France.

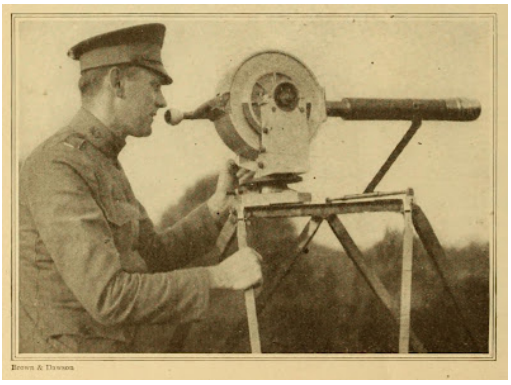
Battlefilm

Overall, U.S. Signal Corps cameramen during World War I shot roughly 590,000 feet of film. Phillip Steward for his book *Battlefilm* did an extensive inventory of these official films which are now at the National Archives in Washington, DC. He listed 993 reels and 488 film titles. In 1936-1937 these films had been culled and re-edited by the Army to combine them into a single subject basis series. The result was the "Historical" series of World War I Signal Corps films with catalog numbers between H-1100 and H-1558. Steward recently added more World War I Signal Corps film to this inventory. In April 2018, he published an article on these films, celebrating the World War I "movie men". His article was printed in the U.S. National Archives' "Prologue" magazine. Here is a download link.

Capt. Albert K. Dawson, U.S. Signal Corps, behind his movie camera. Colorized picture taken in December 1917 at Cramps Shipyard, Philadelphia. Source: National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Link to original high res image

Despite the enormous amount of film footage in the Signal Corps collection, there is little film showing the actual photographic work by the Signal Corps in World War I. The authors however did find two reels which are of special interest. Printed on 35 mm and running 1333 feet, the footage shows Signal Corps cameramen at work, the operations at the Signal Corps photographic laboratory as well as various inspections, parades and close ups of the men behind these war pictures.



Lt. Edwin F. Weigle, U.S. Signal Corps, testing the Akeley "pancake" camera. Picture taken December 1917 by Albert K. Dawson. Source: *Photoplay Magazine*, August 1918
Link to trade paper article

In February 1919, the Signal Corps decided to produce an historical record of their own photographic work in France. For this reason a motion picture cameraman and a still photographer were assigned to record these scenes.
Here are the production notes of this film that we found at the National Archives, including a description of all scenes.

A selection of scenes from these films, as well as the corresponding still photographs, has been uploaded on our YouTube channel. We added contemporary World War I music to this clip.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:57 AM No comments:

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

FRIDAY, AUGUST 26, 2016

World War I Centennial Premiere: "America's Answer" (USA, 1918)

The most succesful official war film released by the American government during World War I, *America's Answer* (1918), now is an odd relic from the past. Watching this movie after almost one hundred years feels strange. As Kevin Brownlow noted in his book *The War, the West and the Wilderness*: "Amused by the titles, intrigued by the antiquity of the equipment, a modern audience can sense none of the manipulative power that the film once had."

Edgar B. Hatrick (left) on the Western Front near Sommedieue, France, April 1918. In the middle: Sergeant Adrian C. Duff, U.S. Signal Corps. Colorized photo from the U.S. Signal Corps Collection, National Archives
Link to original high res image

America's Answer was released in November 1918 by the Commitee on Public Information (CPI), America's wartime propaganda agency. The movie was distributed by the World Film Corporation in 34 cities and grossed over $135,000. The footage was shot by military cameramen of the U.S. Signal Corps.

Opening scene *America's Answer* (1918)

First Showing in Paris

An intriguing story about *America's Answer* has never been told before: the movie was first shown in France, not in the U.S.A. It was first exhibited at the Gaumont Palace in Paris on June 26, 1918, to a a special audience including Field Marshal Joffre as well as the British and American ambassador. The man who was very much instrumental in producing this movie also hasn't been mentioned before: Edgar B. Hatrick, head of Hearst's I.N.S. photo and newsreel service. In April 1918, the CPI sent Hatrick to France to report on the motion picture coverage of the war by the U.S. Signal Corps. His film work in France has been described in more detail in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War.*

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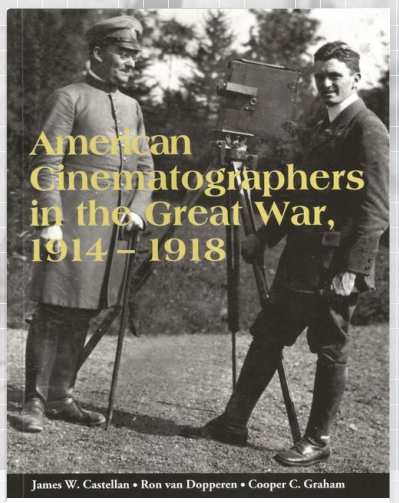

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According to this trade paper report in *Moving Picture World*, Hatrick was sent to Europe as a special representative of George Creel, chairman of the Committee on Public Information, America's wartime propaganda agency. He was given a six months leave of absence by his chief William Randolph Hearst. While supervising the production of war films, Hatrick was accompanied by cinematographer C..J. Hubbell. During this time in France Hatrick also reportedly supervised principal photography for *America's Answer.*

Here is Hatrick's own story about making this movie, as published in the trade paper *Moving Picture World* of August 17, 1918 and in the *Washington News*, September 1918.

Hatrick was also interviewed by *Picture-Play Magazine* for this article "Filming the Fighting Front"(January 1919)

Footage from *America's Answer* is hard to find on the Internet. The Imperial War Museum has four reels of a British version online, and although a good copy it isn't the complete movie as shown on the screen in 1918. The authors found an original print in the files of the National Archives in College Park, MD, and we uploaded all nine reels of this historic movie on America's involvement in World War I.

After almost one hundred years the film is now in the public domain and available to all on the Internet.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 1:46 PM 4 comments:

MONDAY, AUGUST 15, 2016

The Cameramen of the k.u.k. Kriegspressequartier

As far as pictorial publicity is concerned, compared to other belligerents the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy during World War I was remarkably well advanced. As early as July 28, 1914, a military press office was set up - the *k.u.k. Kriegspressequartier* - which even admitted women to the front as official war artists.

As described in our latest book, American cinematographers Albert Dawson, Frank Kleinschmidt and Edwin Weigle wouldn't have been able to make their war films without the assistance of this press office. As embedded camera reporters they accompanied the Austro-Hungarian army on the eastern front, in the Balkans and at the Isonzo front where from 1915 the Italian army tried to break through the Alpine mountain passes.

Franz Pachleitner and his photographic outfit, 1914. From the World War I collection of the Austrian National Archives
Link to low res image

To commemorate the Great War the Austrian TV network ORF2 in September 2014 broadcasted a documentary on the *k.u.k. Kriegspressequartier*, featuring the work by two Austrian cameramen, Alexander Exax and Franz Pachleitner. Exax's pictures were discovered by photo historian Anton Holzer in the archives of the Austrian National Archives. Exax was just 18 when he joined the army and the youngest war photographer at the press office at that time. In his diary he described his experiences in Galicia, Serbia and on the Isonzo front. The Austrian TV documentary shows how his pictures were identified at the Austrian National Archives which still has over 33.000 photographs produced by the military press office.

World War I Centennial Premiere: "America's Answer...
The Cameramen of the k.u.k. Kriegspressequartier
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Setting up movie camera, April 1915. Picture taken by American war correspondent Frank Kleinschmidt with the Austro-Hungarian forces. Courtesy Austrian State Archives. Colorized photograph
Link to original low res image

Kaiser, Krieg und Kamera

Franz Pachleitner from 1914 pioneered in aerial photography. At the outbreak of war he was assigned to *Fliegerkompanie Nr. 10* at Graz-Thalerhof Airport. Most of his pictures were taken at the eastern front in Galicia and the Carpathian mountains. In 1916 Pachleitner taught aerial photography at the military academy in Vienna and from 1917 he covered the war against the Italian army. Despite strict censorship he smuggled most of his war pictures back to Austria, which were kept in the family archives. Shortly before his death he had his war memoirs *Kaiser, Krieg und Kamera* written down by his granddaughter, Carina Klemmer. Pachleitner's war pictures have been uploaded on the Internet by the Austrian National Archives and can be viewed here. His book can be ordered here.

During our research we found several interesting pictures of K.u.K photographers in the field during World War I. These are all from the National Archives in Vienna. Here is a link to our photo album.

Also, here is a video showing the work by these official cameramen from the Austro-Hungarian military press office of World War I, edited from the ORF2 documentary.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:07 AM No comments:

MONDAY, AUGUST 1, 2016

Edwin Weigle's Experiences on the Belgian Battlefields

In September 1914, Edwin F. Weigle - staff photographer of the *Chicago Tribune* - went to Belgium to film the invasion of this country by the German Army. Weigle was the *Tribune's* star cameraman who had just before the outbreak of the Great War filmed the U.S. Marines attack on Vera Cruz, Mexico.

TODAY—
The First and Only Authentic
MOTION PICTURES OF
THE EUROPEAN WAR
The Chicago Tribune
Will Be Shown in Chicago for the First Time
STUDEBAKER THEATRE 25c

Left: Belgian machine gun squad, photographed by Weigle. Right: Weigle's war film *On Belgian Battlefields*, advertised in the *Chicago Tribune*, 14 November 1914
Link to high res image of advertisement

Weigle's war films have been described in more detail in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War.* He wrote a personal account on his film work in Europe, *My Experiences on the Belgian Battlefields,* that was published in late 1914 shortly after Weigle had returned to the United States. In this book Weigle related how he managed to get access to the firing line in Belgium, filmed the German siege of Antwerp in October 1914 and survived the artillery attack on Antwerp in an underground basement together with some fellow American war correspondents.

Edwin Weigle, filming in the ruined city of Aerschot, Belgium
Reproduced from *Photoplay Magazine*, February 1915 - download link to full magazine (92 Mb)

On Belgian Battlefields (USA, 1914)

Weigle's account relates an exciting story. It also provides an interesting case story on how neutral correspondents back in 1914 at the start of World War I covered the military conflict with their movie camera. Weigle's film was released in America in November 1914 under the title *On Belgian Battlefields*. It opened at the elegant Studebaker Theatre in Chicago and was a huge success. The movie was released when public sentiments in the United States on Belgium's fate were running high. The country had been brutally overrun by the Germans, and there was a lot of sympathy for the suffering of the Belgian people. Weigle's film as well as his personal story also is of special interest because of the 'authentic touch'. Although Weigle worked for a pro-German newspaper and didn't mention any atrocities committed by the German Army in Belgium, his book does provide us with a rare opportunity to witness the Great War as seen through the lens of an American film correspondent.

Weigle's 60 page book on his experiences in Belgium is hard to locate nowadays. But we found an original 1914 edition and uploaded the book on this weblog.

To read and download Weigle's book *My Experiences on the Belgian Battlefields* (1914) click this link.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 9:28 PM No comments:

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Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

MONDAY, JULY 25, 2016

Available on Kindle - "American Cinematographers in the Great War"

Last October, when authors Jim Castellan and Ron van Dopperen paid a visit to the Pordenone Silent Film Festival in Italy, our publisher John Libbey mentioned to us that he was considering to have our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War* made available as an eBook. John was quite busy during the film festival, so we showed our appreciation for his continuing support but we expected it would take some time before an eBook version of this publication would be ready.

As it turns out, John struck a deal earlier this year with Amazon, which already has our book in print for sale worldwide, and as a result Amazon from 2016 now also offers a digital Kindle version of *American Cinematographers in the Great War.*

So, for those of you who would like to read this book on their iPad here is a link to the Kindle eBook:

American Cinematographers in the Great War (Amazon/Kindle eBook version, 2016)

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:54 AM No comments:

SATURDAY, JULY 16, 2016

Filmed by Albert K. Dawson - The Catacombs of War (1915)

On August 1, 1915, American cinematographer Albert K. Dawson while following the offensive on the Eastern Front with the Austro-Hungarian army produced a fascinating film report on the Russian trench system. "The breastworks are remarkably modern. I have taken some really great pictures of these trenches", Dawson noted that day in his war diary.

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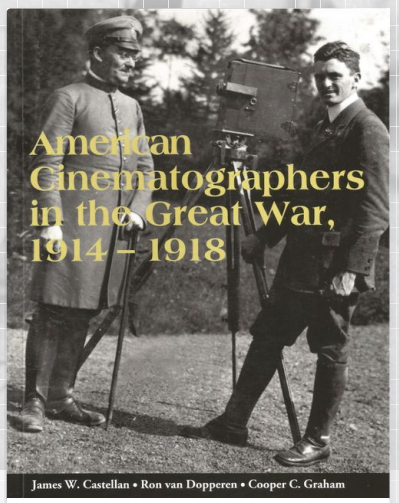

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Dawson with movie camera in the destroyed city of Ivangorod. Colorized photograph from the Austrian National Archives
Link to original high res image

When Dawson wrote these lines he accompanied the Army Detachment under the command of General Remus von Woyrsch, which was just about to capture the Russian forts around Ivangorod. Dawson's notebook shows how he managed to get himself attached to this army and how he risked his life to cover the offensive. Because of the historical value of Dawson's work as a pioneering camera correspondent his war diary on this military campaign was partially published by the authors in 2011 in an article for *Film History* magazine.

Trench Warfare

Born in Vincennes, Indiana, in 1885, Albert K. Dawson was one of the most enterprising film correspondents in World War I. His movie report is particularly significant because - although the Russian front in World War I wasn't known to have been heavily fortified - it does indicate that the Russians had in some sectors developed some remarkably elaborate defenses. According to Dawson, the Russians had learned from the war against Japan in 1905 when the enemy used trenches extensively.

Dawson (right) inspecting Russian trenches near Ivangorod

Shortly after his return to Berlin, Dawson wrote a letter on this trench trip to his family in Indiana, in which he described his experiences. The letter was printed in the [Indiana] *Seymour Republican* on November 29, 1915:

> *On my last trip I had occasion to visit and study some of the Russian fortified field positions in Poland. From a military engineer's point of view they were simply beautiful. To take them with a direct frontal attack would require a force a hundred times as large as the defenders and the loss would be very heavy. In fact, I do not see how any number of infantry could break through without the help of artillery. Scientifically constructed barbed wire obstructions present an obstacle which is well-nigh impassable unless one has a good pair of clippers and a lot of time. And behind these obstructions in underground shelters are concealed machine guns which are so placed as to cover with their sweep the entire front.*
>
> *Of course artillery, if you have enough of it and the right kind, will prepare the way for these attacks by blowing these positions up with explosive shells, but that takes very accurate work and costs a lot of time and ammunition. A well placed shell will do a lot of damage but if you miss your mark just a little bit you can shoot all day and do no damage at all. That is one big lesson we must learn, "digging in".*

Also, in May 1917 Dawson published an article for *Scientific American* on the Russian trench system, which can be viewed and downloaded here.

We uploaded scenes from Dawson's film, showing his visit to the Russian trenches, on our YouTube channel.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:46 PM No comments:

MONDAY, JULY 4, 2016

▼ July (3)
Available on Kindle - "American Cinematographers i...
Filmed by Albert K. Dawson - The Catacombs of War ...
The Enemy Within - German Sabotage in the U.S.A.
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The Enemy Within - German Sabotage in the U.S.A.

On February 2, 1915, German officer Werner Horn bombed the international railroad bridge in Vancesboro, Maine, in an attempt to sabotage transport of war supplies to Canada. Masterminded by spymaster Franz von Papen, the bombing was the first public act of sabotage by German agents in America during World War I. Arriving on the scene shortly after the explosion, Louis de Rochemont filmed the aftermath of the stirring attack.

Werner Horn and Sheriff Ross (1915). Press photograph copied from the files at the National Archives

Breaking News

The sabotage of the Vanceboro Bridge was breaking news in the United States. A number of film crews arrived in town looking for newsreel footage but left with nothing truly usable. However, Louis de Rochemont, a 16 year old freelance cameraman from Massachusetts, was able to capture the story. He reportedly convinced Deputy Sheriff Ross into a reenactment of Horn's arrest and combined it with footage of the damaged bridge into a newsreel that he sold to *Hearst-Selig News Pictorial*. A 16 mm. print of the historical footage that was shown at the local Vanceboro theater has survived and was made available to the Northeast Historic Film Archives in Bucksport, Maine. Because of its historical value the film was restored by UCLA Film and Television Archive.

Deputy Sheriff Ross and Werner Horn pose for de Rochemont's camera.

Although the surviving print doesn't have a reenactment of Horn's arrest the film does include a close-up of the German secret agent and Deputy Sheriff Ross. Both are shown posing in front of de Rochemont's movie camera. Here is a full review of the contemporary newsreel:

> *HEARST-SELIG PICTORIAL NO. 12 (Feb.11) [1915] — Testing new fire escape. Man slides down rope from top of Munsey Building, Washington, to street, eleven stories below. Mid-winter Carnival at Saranac Lake, N. Y. Picturesque parade. Twenty children are injured in Orphanage wrecked by wind in New Orleans, La. Grace Darling visits bide-a-wee, home for abandoned animals, in New York City, and has interesting experience. First pictures of Italian earthquake. Avezzano, [shot by Ariel Varges] where 10,000 persons perished, a levelled waste. Maimed and destitute survivors are cared for by militia and volunteer aid corps. Searching for victims. Houses demolished at Yarmouth, England, in daring aerial invasion by Zeppelins. Mounted infantry and motor guards patrol English coast. International bridge across St. Croix River at Vanceboro, Maine, is damaged in dynamite blast.*

The scoop by de Rochemont is mentioned in Raymond Fielding's classic film history book *The American Newsreel*. One of the earliest references we could find was in a newspaper story by the [*Kansas] Emporia Gazette* on October 23, 1937: "De Rochemont persuaded the marshal who had Horn in custody to reenact the arrest. The newsreel company to whom de Rochemont sold the film at first refused to accept it on the ground that it was faked, but the budding cameraman persuaded them that it had been re-enacted just as it had taken place, and they used it."

Nicknamed "the father of the docu-drama", de Rochemont in the 1930s created the groundbreaking newsreel series *March of Time*. His early documentary productions won two Academy Awards. Louis de Rochemont died in Newington, New Hampshire, on December 23, 1978.

A reconstruction of the making of de Rochemont's World War I film has been uploaded on our YouTube channel.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:00 AM No comments:

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Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company*. James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

MONDAY, JUNE 20, 2016

Lost & Found - "The Battles of A Nation" (USA, 1915)

Walter De Swaef from Belgium recently contacted us about a remarkable World War I silent newsreel that he had discovered on the Internet, showing among other scenes fighting along the Western Front, including combat in Belgium. Based on copyright references that we had found earlier at the Library of Congress, we could identify some of the scenes from this footage, which were culled from Albert K. Dawson's 1915 feature film *The Battles of A Nation.*

Frame enlargement found at the Library of Congress from *The Battles of A Nation*. Note the copyright reference to the American Correspondent Film Company
Link to high res image

First shown on November 18, 1915, at the Park Theatre in New York City, *The Battles of A Nation* pictured the attack by the Austro-German Army at the Eastern Front and highlighted the capture of Lemberg (Lviv), the Galician capital, and Warsaw. We had found similar scenes before, both in the nitrate vaults at the Library of Congress, as well as in footage that was used for an Austrian TV documentary on the First World War. But until this discovery we were never quite sure about the actual identity and the original production company. The intertitles in the footage however mention the American Correspondent Film Company (A.C.F) - the film company Dawson worked for - and provide us with some solid proof.

Cameraman Albert K. Dawson
Link to high res image Dawson in camp before Przemysl

Propaganda Tool

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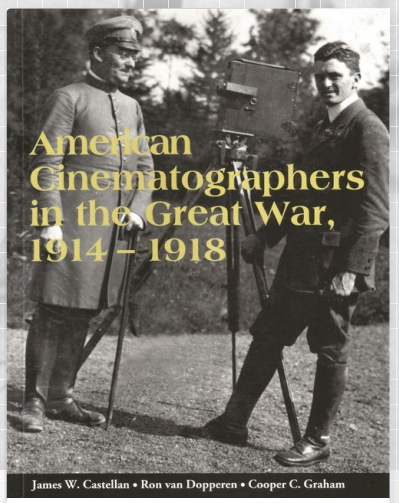

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Captured on Film by U.S. Cameramen - The Romanov Murder Scene (1918)

World War I Combat Camera Edwin F. Weigle Found!

Anatomy of an Authentic World War I Combat Scene (1915)

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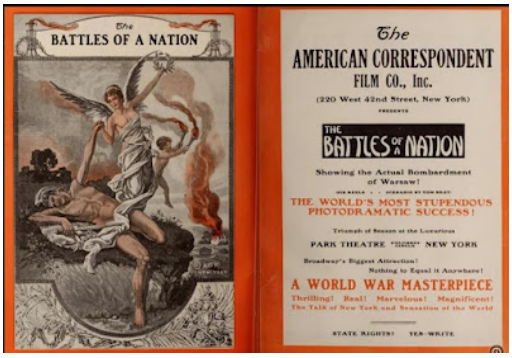
As described in more detail in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*, the American Correspondent Film Company was secretly funded by the Germans in 1915 and used as a propaganda tool in the United States. Apart from film shot by Dawson, the company also used films that were supplied by the Zentralstelle für Auslandsdienst, Germany's official foreign propaganda agency in World War I.

Here is a synopsis of this film, as listed in the catalogue of the American Film Institute.



Advertisement *Battles of A Nation*. Source: www.imdb.com

The footage was uploaded by a stock film library, Periscope, in February 2015 and it is a very messy and no doubt pirated compilation with original World War I footage from a number of sources, including Eclair Films. Apart from the footage that came from Dawson's war film, the film also shows some remarkable scenes taken in 1914, showing the German invasion of Belgium and the resistance by the Belgian army. We contacted Periscope film researcher Nick Spark about the footage, and he said these films were not copied from other archives but come from Periscope's own collection. So, the provenance of this historic World War I movie for the moment remains a mystery, but the authors together with Walter De Swaef are still trying to find out more about this remarkable film.

"Battles of a Nation" Makes War for Lasting Peace

American Correspondent Feature, Differing from Films with Scenes Taken at the Front by Story Woven in Its Action, Is Plea Against World Conflict

SCENES FROM "THE BATTLES OF A NATION," LATEST PICTURES FROM EUROPEAN WAR ZONE

Review *Battles of A Nation*. Source: *Motion Picture News*, 4 December 1915
Link to trade paper article

Mr. De Swaef discovered this film while researching his book *Duitse Oorlogsgruwel in Aalst*. This book deals with the attack and destruction of the Belgian city of Aalst (Alost) in September/October 1914 by the German army, in the process of which 40 Belgian civilians were killed.

We have also uploaded the original *The Battles of A Nation* scenes from this Periscope footage on our YouTube channel.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:00 AM No comments:

MONDAY, JUNE 6, 2016

Arthur Sintzenich and the U.S. School of Military Cinematography (1918)

America's first training ground for military cameramen featured in a previous weblog on Carl Gregory and his contribution to the U.S. School of Military Cinematography at Columbia University. Together with Gregory another cinematographer was instrumental in setting up this new school in January 1918 - Arthur H.C. Sintzenich. Surprisingly, he was British.

► July (3)
▼ June (2)
Lost & Found - "The Battles of A Nation" (USA, 1915)
Arthur Sintzenich and the U.S. School of Military ...
► May (2)
► April (3)
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Left: Sintzenich making movies at an airfield in Sussex, England, October 1918. Right: Portrait 1st Lieutenant Sintzenich, U.S. Signal Corps, Paris, May 1919

Link to high res image (left)
Link to high res image (right)

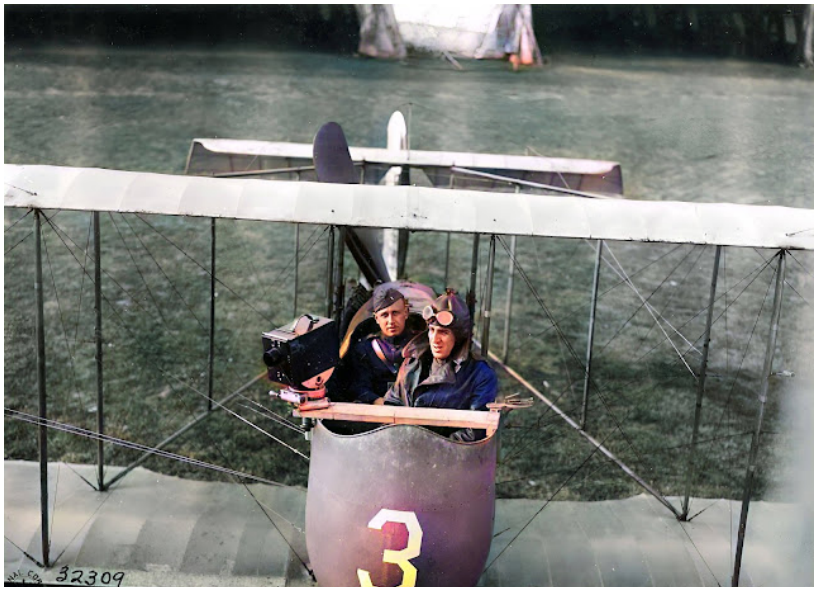
Nicknamed "Snitch", Sintzenich was born in London on August 14, 1884. He is among the best known early cameramen in film history mainly because of his personal diaries that are now at the Library of Congress. From 1913, he recorded his career as a cinematographer in great detail. Nowadays Sintzenich is probably best remembered for his work in the 1920s as a cameraman with director D.W. Griffith. His contribution to the U.S. School of Military Cinematography has remained somewhat underexposed, so this weblog is another attempt to set the record straight and give Sintzenich the credits that he deserves.

Filming Safari, Newsreels and Harry Houdini

Sintzenich became a motion picture cameraman in 1909 and his first job in England was with Kinemacolor, the first succesful color system introduced by Charles Urban. Filming his way around the world in the West Indies and Canada, Sintzenich in 1914 went to Africa to capture a safari on film. He then became a newsreel and studio cameraman for Universal in the United States and in 1916 went to the Bahamas to film underwater footage for the movie *The Submarine Eye*. This experience no doubt also helped him to film the world famous stunt artist Harry Houdini during one of his escape performances.

When America entered the Great War in 1917 Sintzenich applied for a commission as cameraman in the U.S. Signal Corps. He entered the Signal Corps as a master signal electrician in December 1917. The entry of his diary for January 2, 1918, mentions: "Took Carl Gregory up and introduced him to the Captain with the result [that] he was requested [to] apply for a commission right away." Just two days later at Columbia University Sintzenich and Gregory for the first time went over the blue prints for the new facilities that were required for the U.S. School of Military Cinematography. During the next days Sintzenich worked hard on interviewing many applicants for the job of photographic instructor. The entry for January 9, 1918, says: "Made up a final curriculum of instruction with Gregory." Sintzenich also drew up the final plan for the film lab at the campus. Meanwhile Gregory returned from Washington, D.C. on January 17, 1918, with the news that he had been commissioned second Lieutenant and was made "Production Expert" for the new school. The two men worked on the outside plans of the film lab the very same day.

The diary clearly demonstrates that the U.S. School of Military Cinematography was a co-production by the two men, although Sintzenich seems to have done most of the work during the first formative weeks in January 1918. Sintzenich's work stopped suddenly when he was ordered to report in Washington, D.C. for special work. He was called to make movies for the Committee on Public Information, America's wartime propaganda agency, but Sintzenich turned the offer down when he found out he could only do this work as a civilian because of his British nationality.



2nd Lieut. A.H.C. Sintzenich, U.S. Signal Corps, operating a Debrie film camera from Farman Plane No. 1741 and 1st Lieut. A.W. Bevin, A.S. pilot, about to make a flight over the Aerodrome at Sussex, England, October 1918. Colorized picture.
Link to original high res image

In February 1918, Sintzenich had finished all of his preparations. Two new labs were ready, new camera equipment had been ordered and he had built up a complete staff of instructors who would teach the recruits how to film and photograph America's entry into World War I. Among the new instructors was Victor Fleming, who would later be President Wilson's official photographer during his first visit to Europe. Fleming after the war became one of America's top film directors. Sintzenich noted on February 16, 1918: "Vic Fleming, cameraman for Douglas Fairbanks, has been put in charge of the movie men, temporarily. An awfully good fellow."

A Day at the U.S. School of Military Cinematography

Sintzenich and Gregory not only set up the new school, they also went to Fort Slocum for basic training with the first batch of fresh recruits. A typical day, as described by Sintzenich, for the soldiers would be as follows:

> *Wednesday - April 24, 1918: Our usual routine again today. Drills and classes at semaphore. The Motion Picture Office Quarters are moved from the Library to the Havemeyer Hall. The unit carrying over the equipment, etc. In the afternoon I gave them a lecture on camera construction, explaining parts etc, then out for a "hike".*

In May 1918, Sintzenich was taken to City Hall and came back an American citizen. He boarded the *SS Leviathan* in August 1918 and went over to France. If he expected to see any action he was soon disappointed . Most of his photographic work consisted of making identification snapshots of American soldiers. From September 1918 until the Armistice he spent his work for the U.S. Signal Corps photographing American camps, airfields and hospitals in England.

Lt. Sintzenich on the roof of an ambulance, making moving pictures in London of a crowd outside of Buckingham Palace who are celebrating the Armistice, November 1918. Colorized picture.
Link to original high res image

Long after the Great War Sintzenich remained active as a cinematographer in Hollywood, the Soviet Union and elsewhere. He spent three years in India, working for the Eastman Kodak Company, and on his return to America in May 1932 Sintzenich again joined forces with Carl Gregory. In a family letter Gregory wrote:

> *"Hal Sintzenich, a camera friend of mine, comes here every day and works with me in the hope that we can make some stuff we can sell. He has not been able to get anything to do since he came back and so we have been working as best we can without capital to try and make something with what I have here. We are building a [motion picture] machine for trick work ... We started building the machine two weeks ago yesterday and estimate that we have it about half finished. Of course we can't do any work with it to bring in any money. We start to work on it about 9.00 every morning and work until nearly midnight."*

Sintzenich died in Charleston, South Carolina, in August 1974.

Information from Sintzenich Diaries courtesy Cooper C. Graham. With special thanks also to Charles "Buckey" Grimm for providing us with some family letters by Carl Gregory.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:12 AM 2 comments:

ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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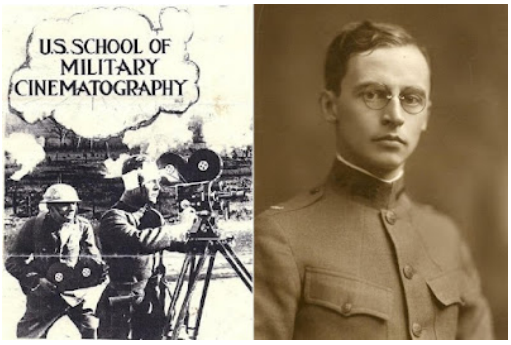
First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

WEDNESDAY, MAY 25, 2016

Carl Gregory and the U.S. School of Military Cinematography (1918)

In January 1918, America's first school of Military Cinematography started at Columbia University in New York. Still photographers and motion picture cameramen were trained for the U.S. Signal Corps that had been assigned to record America's involvement in the First World War. A key role in setting up this school was played by pioneering cinematographer Carl Louis Gregory.



Left: Cover booklet on U.S. School of Military Cinematography (1918). Right: U.S. Signal Corps Lieutenant Carl L. Gregory. Photograph courtesy Buckey Grimm
Link to low res image right

Gregory's name is listed as chief instructor in motion picture photography in a 1918 booklet on the U.S. School of Military Cinematography, that was kindly supplied to us by Buckey Grimm. A copy of this historical document can be read and downloaded here.

Commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant, Gregory took charge of all lessons in military photography for the students at Columbia University. He worked closely on this with a British cinematographer Arthur H.C. Sintzenich - we will discuss his involvement in this project in an upcoming weblog. Another instructor in motion picture photography at this school was Victor Fleming, the well-known future director of *Gone with the Wind*.

Early Career in Cinematography

When Gregory entered Columbia University he had already earned himself a reputation as one of the foremost cinematographers in the American film industry. Born in Walnut, Kansas, in 1882, Gregory opened his first photography studio in 1905. In 1908 he transferred to the U.S. Reclamation Service where he was in charge of filing and classifying negatives, prints and lantern slides. It was here that Gregory had his first real experiences with making movies. In 1909 he joined the Edison Company as a cameraman and director. A year later he joined the Thanhouser Company and became the studio's chief cameraman. During the First World War Gregory was cinematographer for the Williamson brothers when they shot their groundbreaking underwater films in the West Indies. Gregory in 1916 worked with Sintzenich on a similar project, shooting underwater footage. Both would meet again when they set up the U.S. School of Military Cinematography at Columbia University in January 1918.

Carl Gregory, seated on a box behind his camera, at work for the U.S. Signal Corps (1918). Photograph Jonathan Silent Film Collection

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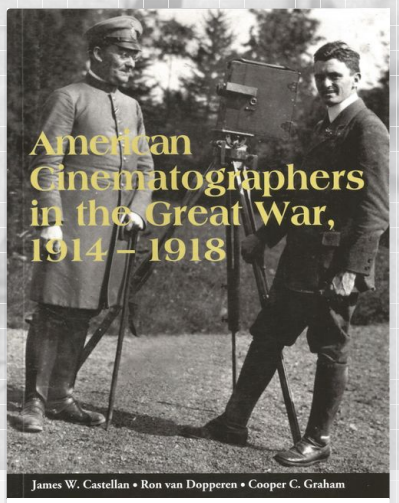

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Experiences at Columbia University

Gregory's technical skills as a cameraman were highly acclaimed. A *Moving Picture World* article published July 10, 1915, mentions he was the first American photographer made an honorary member of the Royal Society of Photographers of Great Britain. After the Great War, the May 10, 1919, *Moving Picture World* published Gregory's article about his experiences as chief instructor at the U.S. School of Military Cinematography. In it he reported the school initially was handicapped by a severe shortage of film cameras. At the campus of Columbia University two large chemical labs were converted into a still and motion picture laboratory. A large building near the Cathedral of St. John served as barracks for the Signal Corps recruits. As described by Gregory, the crash course in motion picture photography took about six weeks:

> *".. After they had been taught the preliminary operations of setting-up, threading, cranking, tilting and panoraming, they were first permitted to take short sample scenes of familiar subjects about the University, and then after having demonstrated their ability to handle the camera, they were given definite assignments to obtain certain kinds of pictures, at events which were happening in the city or of various activities in the near-by camps."*

In a letter to his mother Gregory also described his experiences at Columbia University:

> *"I am in charge of all photographic instruction ... So far I have had over two hundred students nearly half of whom have been sent away to go across to France with a class of twenty ready and waiting for orders to go. My hours are long but the work is pleasant for the boys are interested in their work and eager to learn and the University is probably as pleasant a place to work as any place that one could find in the city. The hours are 8 A.M. to 6 P.M. and every 6th day I am officer of the day when I have to be on duty from 5.45 A.M. to 9.00 P.M."*

Carl Gregory (left) with the U.S. Signal Corps. The picture was probably taken at Columbia University in 1918. Courtesy Buckey Grimm. Colorized photograph
Link to original low res image

Gregory after the First World War was named Dean of Photography at the New York Institute of Photography. He still kept his hand in the business, directing and photographing movies, as well as publishing books on motion picture photography. In the 1940s he worked for the Library of Congress and was the first person to restore an historic collection of early films on paper prints. Gregory was working as Motion Picture Engineer at the National Archives at the time, and he had just designed and built an Optical Printer for shrunken and damaged film. They took the material to the Archives and Gregory modified the Optical Printer and was able to successfully copy the material. Some of this material was used for the RKO Pathé "Flicker Flashbacks" Series back in the mid 1940s. Thus a precious collection of early American cinema was saved and restored on film.

Carl Gregory died in 1951 at his home in Van Nuys, California. More information on Gregory's fascinating life and work can be found in the article *Life through a Lens* by Charles "Buckey" Grimm for *Film History* journal (2001).

With special thanks to Charles "Buckey" Grimm for his input on this weblog.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:38 AM 3 comments:

MONDAY, MAY 9, 2016

The Rothacker Film Manufacturing Company

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Carl Gregory and the U.S. School of Military Cinem...
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Buckey Grimm recently sent us an interesting photograph that he had posted on his Twitter account, which sheds some new light on the making of Wilbur H. Durborough's World War I feature documentary *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (1915). It shows a group of cameramen from Watterson R. Rothacker's film studio in Chicago, posing for a picture together with one of the fastest and sportiest cars at the time, a Stutz Bearcat roadster. The same car was used by Durborough when he covered the Great War in Europe.

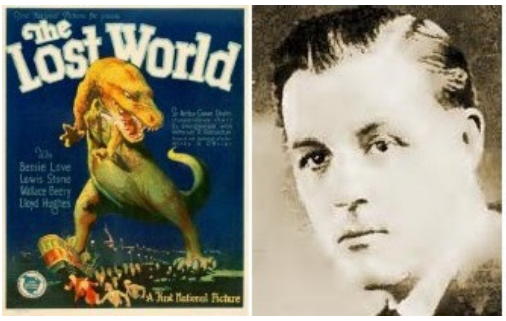
Cameramen working for Rothacker's film company, together with Durborough's Stutz. Chicago, October 1915. Courtesy Buckey Grimm. Colorized picture.

Link to original high res image

The picture appears to have been taken shortly after Durborough had returned from Germany to the United States. A sign mentioning the Dutch harbor of Rotterdam, from which the car had been shipped back to America, can still be seen attached to the Stutz. As indicated by the picture, Durborough arrived in Chicago in October 1915 and the Rothacker Film Manufacturing Company presumably was the plant where he had his raw footage shot in wartime Europe developed and printed. Also, Durborough's camera operator Irving Guy Ries worked for this film company, which seems to have been an additional reason to visit the Rothacker studio.

Industrial Motion Picture Company

Orginally named the "Industrial Motion Picture Company", Rothacker had launched this firm in December 1909, together with his business partners Carl Laemmle and R.H. Cochrane. It specialized in the making of industrial films that were used for advertising companies, but Rothacker's studio also produced topical films which were sold to the American newsreels. In 1913, Laemmle sold his stock and concentrated his efforts on setting up the Universal Film Company. As a result, Rothacker became president and general manager. Apart from producing film, the plant which was located at 222-233 Erie Street in North Chicago, occupied 7,000 square feet of floor space and had one of the largest laboratories in the era of silent film for processing and printing motion pictures, including 12 printing machines, rooms supplied with air conditioning by hygrometers and sprinklers, as well as a drying room with a capacity for 10,000 feet of film at one time. "With present facilities, the company can put a battery of seven cameras in the field at one time", reported *Motography* on May 16, 1914.



Film poster *The Lost World* (1925). Right: Portrait Watterson R. Rothacker (1885-1960)

Watterson Rothacker had started his career as an editor for the trade paper *Billboard* and in 1927 became general manager for First National. He now probably is best remembered as a coproducer for the movie *The Lost World* (1925), which inspired Steven Spielberg to produce his famous *Jurassic World* films.

Watterson Rothacker died in Santa Monica, California, on January 25, 1960.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:54 AM No comments:

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Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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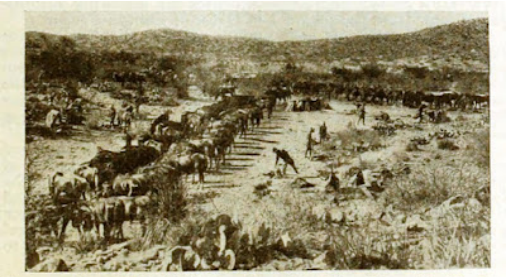
First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

MONDAY, APRIL 25, 2016

Chasing Pancho Villa - Tracy Mathewson in Mexico (1916)

In more ways than one, General "Black Jack" Pershing's expedition into Mexico of 1916 was a rehearsal for America's entry in World War I. The punitive expedition that was set up to capture Pancho Villa and take revenge on his attack on American soldiers in Columbus, New Mexico, not only tested the army's military capacity. For the first time in history the U.S. Army was also confronted with a new kind of reporter - the newsreel photographer.



Troops F and H, U. S. Cavalry, Breaking Camp in Mexico
Photographed by Mathewson.

Picture by Mathewson. From *Moving Picture World*, July 8, 1916

Link to trade paper article

On March 16, 1916, Secretary of War Newton D. Baker - after consulting with the army - announced that six correspondents would be attached to Pershing's army. The only accredited photographer was William Fox who worked for Underwood & Underwood. His pictures would be syndicated to all American newspapers. Among the embedded journalists were no Hearst reporters and no cinematographers. Ignoring the newsreel companies did not prove to be a wise strategy. With the news of Villa's attack breaking in on all headlines, the Hearst organization sent one of their most enterprising newsreel cameramen to Mexico: Tracy B. Mathewson.

Born in 1876 in Augusta, Georgia, Mathewson started working as a photographer for the local papers in Atlanta around 1905. One of these newspapers, the *Atlanta Georgian*, was controlled by the Hearst news organization. Combining still photography with the latest medium of motion pictures, Mathewson became a newsreel cameraman. The Library of Congress has a picture showing both Mathewson and William Fox in Mexico, dated January 29, 1914. The photograph was copyrighted by the Mutual Film Company and this suggests that Mathewson at the time may have been covering the Mexican War for Mutual when the film company struck a deal with Pancho Villa to produce exclusive battle pictures of his military campaigns.

Mathewson and Fox in Mexico, 1914

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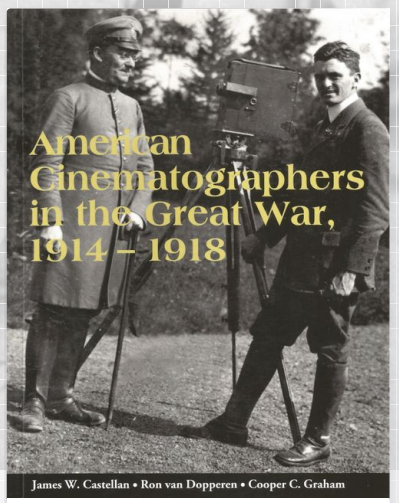

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Capturing the Klu Klux Klan

By 1916 Mathewson had earned himself a reputation as one of the most resourceful news photographers in the United States. According to Scott M. Cutlip in his book *The Unseen Power* on the history of public relations, when D.W. Griffith's *Birth of A Nation* was released in 1915, the public interest in the Klu Klux Klan had risen to a degree that Mathewson decided to become the first cameraman to capture the Klan. Accordingly, he dressed up a group of Afro-Americans as Klan members, just like he had seen in Griffith's movie, and produced some spectacular news pictures that were reproduced in renowned newspapers such as the *New York Times*.

When Pancho Villa's border raid made national headlines Mathewson was working nearby for the *Hearst-Vitagraph News Pictorial*. Mathewson said he got into Columbus, New Mexico, one day after Villa's attack and was allowed to follow General Pershing's forces until they reached Casas Grandes where Brigade Headquarters had been set up. Mathewson's pictures were by all accounts a major scoop. *Moving Picture World* in the issue of April 8, 1916, reported "stirring scenes" in the Hearst newsreels, showing General Slocum and his staff preparing to get Villa, while a guard of honor paces before his tent guarding the Americans who had been killed in the raid. More pictures by Mathewson, showing victims of the border raid, were to be released in *Hearst-Vitagraph News* no. 23, on March 20, 1916.

Despite all military regulations Mathewson managed to get himself attached to Pershing's staff, together with other correspondents. Around April 1, 1916, at Brigade Headquarters in Casas Grandes his picture was taken. Mathewson, proudly holding his movie tripod, can be seen in the middle together with his fellow journalists. The picture clearly shows that the War Department's attempt to regulate any kind of photography during the expedition was a dismal failure. Apart from the "official photographer" from Underwood & Underwood not only Mathewson was covering the war but also his colleague Adrian Duff, news photographer for the American Press Association. The U.S. Army clearly was at a loss to control any kind of pictorial coverage of their invasion of Mexico.

American reporters at Casas Grandes, April 1916. Mathewson is in the middle holding his movie tripod. To his right photographer Adrian Duff. The picture was probably taken by William Fox. Source: National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Link to low res image

Avalanche of Complaints

To make matters even worse, the Hearst organization promoted Mathewson in their own publicity. In a press statement released on March 27, 1916, it was announced that Mathewson - "designated as official photographer of the War Department" - had just returned to the United States together with his films that were sealed up "to be sponsored by the War Department" before exhibition. This attempt to cash in on the publicity value of Mathewson's war pictures created an avalanche of complaints by rival newsreel companies, notably the *Selig-Tribune Weekly* that was controlled by the *Chicago Tribune*. Editor Lucien Wheeler demanded that the War Department either confiscate Mathewson's films, because he had taken these without proper authority, or share prints of the negatives with other newsreel companies. On April 18, 1916, with Mathewson's films still in the custody of the War Department, all major newsreel companies combined forces and jointly requested the War Department to release his films for syndication. They desparately wanted Mathewson's pictures and were willing to work together if necessary.

The documents at the National Archives on Mathewson's film work do not reveal how his motion pictures were used in the end. But the government records do show that the military ban on private film makers entering Mexico was totally ineffectual. The U.S. Army simply didn't have an appropriate administrative mechanism to control motion picture photography. When America entered World War I in 1917, the frustrating experiences with Mathewson during the Punitive Expedition must have contributed to the decision to accredit no civilian photographer with the American army and make the U.S. Signal Corps solely responsible for any film coverage on the European battlegrounds.

Mathewson's own story on his experiences in Mexico - no doubt embellished by a Hearst copywriter - can be read and downloaded here.

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Mathewson, cranking his movie camera, during the Prince of Wales' visit to Canada. Copied from *Photoplay Magazine*, March 1920

Link to low res image

Until his retirement Tracy Mathewson remained active as a professional photographer and newsreel cameraman, working for Fox, Pathé and as a freelancer. He was personal photographer to Edward VII, Prince of Wales, during his visit to Canada in 1919. In 1955 Mathewson received the Burt Williams Award for distinguished service in photography.

Tracy Mathewson died in 1957 in Jasper, Georgia.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:40 AM No comments:

MONDAY, APRIL 11, 2016

Digitizing First World War Film

To mark the centennial of World War I the Imperial War Museum has digitized its film collection - one of the oldest and largest in the world. Over 200 hours of film, contributing to one quarter of total footage, can be seen on the European Film Gateway 1914, the webportal featuring the Great War on film.

During our research on the American cinematographers of World War I we were fortunate enough to discover some interesting footage in the film collection of the Imperial War Museum, notably scenes from Albert K. Dawson's *The Battle and Fall of Przemysl* (1915).

Malins and McDowell, official cinematographers of *Battle of the Somme* (1916)

***Battle of the Somme* (GB, 1916)**

A highlight of this film collection in the Imperial War Museum is the original 1916 record of *The Battle of the Somme*, now granted UNESCO "Memory of the World" status. Shot by two official cinematographers, Geoffrey Malins and John B. McDowell, the film depicts the British Army in the preliminaries and early days of the Battle of the Somme. A huge success, the film was watched by 20 million British people in the first six weeks of exhibition and distributed in eighteen more countries. The film had a terrific impact on public opinion. This was in part due to its graphic depiction of trench warfare, including showing dead and wounded British and German soldiers, as well as the fact that it opened while the battle was still raging and casualties were being taken.

British soldiers going over the top. Scene from *Battle of the Somme* (1916)

Check out the video for more information on how this movie was made and the historical World War I film collection of the Imperial War Museum.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:23 AM 2 comments:

FRIDAY, APRIL 1, 2016

D.W. Griffith's "Hearts of the World" Revisited

After almost one hundred years, the making of D.W. Griffith's World War I drama Hearts of the World (1918) still is surrounded by mysteries. Griffith made two trips to the front while he was working on this new film, and contemporary publicity reported he and his party worked under extremely dangerous conditions. But as for authenticity most of his frontline scenes were staged in front of the camera in Britain and the United States. Real World War I footage in this film is extremely rare and came from Frank E. Kleinschmidt's film War on Three Fronts (1917) which was edited with much artistic license.

Movie Poster *Hearts of the World* (USA, 1918)
Link to high res image

Commissioned by the British government, Griffith started production of this movie shortly after America had entered the First World War. *Hearts of the World* clearly was a propaganda undertaking, but it also has the 'Griffith touch' and is primarily a love story. Two American families share a house in a peaceful French town. The Boy (Robert Harron) of one family and the Girl (Lillian Gish) of the other have a romance. When war breaks out the Boy joins the army and the Girl puts her wedding dress in a box. Despite heroic resistance from the defenders of the town, they are overcome by the brutal onslaught of the enemy. The village is destroyed by heavy artillery and the Boy's father and the Girl's mother and grandfather are killed.

War on Three Fronts (USA, 1916)

Griffith's Germans are of course depicted as brutes, as German villains usually were during the war. At one point in the film the Girl's virginity is even threatened by Von Strohm, the main villain. The actual scene showing the cause for all this mass killing however came from a completely different source and movie: Frank E. Kleinschmidt's *War on Three Fronts*. In 1916, Kleinschmidt had returned to America with his film showing his experiences in wartime Europe on the eastern, the Italian and the Balkan fronts. Kleinschmidt showed his movie on the West Coast and in the Midwest before it was released by Selznick Pictures in April 1917. Among the footage found by the authors while researching our latest book *American Cinematographers in the Great War* is a scene showing an Austrian artillery crew firing the latest type of 15-centimeter gun. Filmed by Kleinschmidt with the assistance of the Austro-Hungarian military press office, this scene was taken around Tarnow in May 1915, during the attack of the Austro-German army on the eastern front.

D.W. Griffith in the trenches on the Western Front, 1917

Kleinschmidt's film was later bought by Griffith and this key scene was edited into *Hearts of the World*, but now the Austrian gunners are introduced as savage German soldiers out to destroy the peaceful French village with everyone in it. Despite the way it was used, it is one of the few authentic World War I scenes in Griffith's classic film.

A video showing both the original scene filmed by Kleinschmidt and the edit done three years later by Griffith has been uploaded on our YouTube channel.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:48 AM No comments:

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Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

TUESDAY, MARCH 15, 2016

The Movie Camera that Revolutionized War Films

In 1915 wildlife explorer Carl Akeley patented a new type of movie camera that revolutionized the film industry. Nicknamed the "pancake" because of its peculiar rounded shape, it sported an internal gyroscope, which allowed the camera to tilt straight up while the viewfinder remained fixed. Originally designed for filming outdoor scenes, the camera was quickly adopted by the U.S. Signal Corps when America entered the First World War.

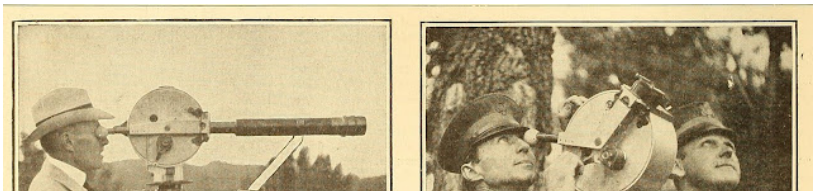
Edwin Weigle (left) and Carl Akeley, testing the "pancake" movie camera, December 1917. Colorized picture from: *American Cinematographers in the Great War* (2014)

Claim to Fame

A jack of all trades, Akeley was a taxidermist, sculptor, biologist, conservationist, inventor and nature photographer, noted for his contributions to American museums. His major contribution to film history was the "pancake", a lightweight camera that was very popular with newsreel cameramen but that was only when they were able to find one that was still available. After the American entry into World War I the Signal Corps was most eager to use Akeley's camera and as a result the "pancake" was sold out within a few months. The shutter mechanism was the camera's real claim to fame. The rotary design of the body gave room for the shutter to travel all the way around its circumference. As a result, the shutter angle was 230 degrees. Standard motion picture cameras at the time had a 180 degree shutter, or less. The result of having 50 degrees more shutter is having longer shutter speeds and gaining almost 1/3rd more light than standard cameras. This was important to Akeley because the majority of his filming while shooting wildlife across the globe was during the dusk and dawn hours when lighting was not ideal.

Akeley camera, as used for aerial cinematography in the World War I classic movie *Wings* (1927)

This was also where the "pancake" made a huge difference when used by the American army at the western front. With most of the military activities taking place at dusk or dawn under extremely difficult lighting conditions, Akeley's camera proved to be a suitable war film camera both for documentary purposes on the ground and for aerial reconnaissance.



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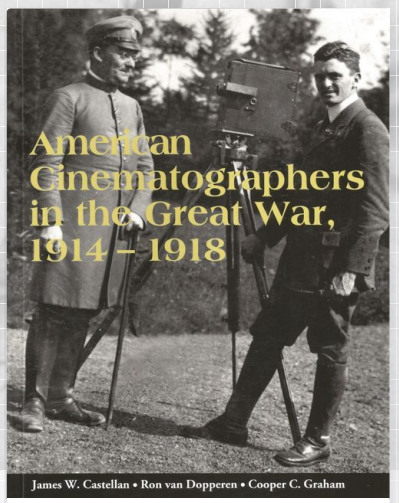

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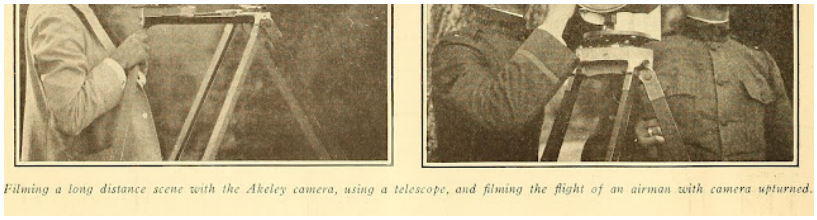

Akeley camera, demonstrated for trade paper *Motography*, April 1918. Pictures by Albert K. Dawson
Link to high res image

According to a press release in March 1918, Akeley had come to Washington, DC, shortly after the American entry into the war to place his camera at the disposal of the newly created Photographic Division. The U.S. Signal Corps soon decided to adopt it as the 'box' for their official war photographers. The first test shots with the pancake film camera for military purposes were made by Signal Corps cameraman Victor Fleming, the future director of *Gone with the Wind* (1939), as well as Edwin F. Weigle who had filmed in wartime Germany before joining the original team of the Signal Corps Photographic Division.
Here is a link to the original photograph, showing Weigle and Akely demonstrating this film camera, from the collection of the National Archives.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:49 AM No comments:

FRIDAY, MARCH 4, 2016

Filming Field Marshal von Hindenburg (1915)

In January 1915, American cinematographer Ansel E. Wallace visited *Oberst Ost*, General Headquarters for the Eastern Front in Posen, East Prussia, where he filmed Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg and his military staff. Long considered lost, his film report has recently been retrieved by the authors in a contemporary German newsreel released by Messter.

Scene from *Messter Woche* newsreel # 16 (April 1915), filmed by A.E. Wallace

Wallace arrived in Germany in December 1914 on an assignement for William Randolph Hearst to produce motion pictures and still photographs on the German side of the war. As described in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*, Wallace needed to pull a lot of strings before he could make his movies. When he finally got to the Eastern Front he ended up in the aftermath of the battle of Lodz.

In an interview with the *Boston American* Wallace mentioned that he caught up with Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, presumably at Posen. Edward Lyell Fox, a fellow American war correspondent, in his book *Behind the Scenes in Warring Germany* (1915) described how a cranky and grumpy Von Hindenburg was captured by Wallace on film:

> *"An American "movie man" [Wallace] finally induced Von Hindenburg to stand before a movie camera. He did it in a way that made you think of the old J.P. Morgan who wanted to smash every camera he saw. For only a few seconds did Hindenburg walk in front of the movie machine but when that picture was shown in a Berlin theater the audience broke into wild applause. Von Hindenburg is the big man in Germany to-day. As a popular idol he rivals the Kaiser."*

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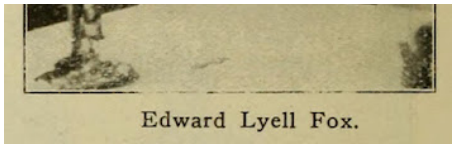

War correspondent Edward Lyell Fox. Source: *Moving Picture World*, 25 December 1915
Link to trade paper article

A conservative and aristocrat at heart, Von Hindenburg must have needed some persuasion to act as a movie star. Films in those days were frequently considered cheap and vulgar entertainment. Until recently, all that remained of Wallace's film was a picture from an advertisement in the American film trade press. A copy of the film recently was found in *Messter Woche* newsreel No. 16, which was released in Germany in April 1915. The original film is at the Austrian Film Museum. Although part of the footage has been badly damaged the film does clearly show that the German Field Marshal played his part in a distinctly cold and detached manner.

Power Struggle

Wallace made these pictures at a crucial moment in World War I when Von Hindenburg was plotting against his Chief of Staff, Erich von Falkenhayn, who after the terrible bloodbath at Ypres in November 1914 had lost all confidence Germany could force a decisive battle against the Entente forces. Von Hindenburg insisted Falkenhayn should be dismissed or he would resign himself. In the end the Field Marshal had to back down because Falkenhayn was supported by Kaiser Wilhelm II. Among other reasons, the Kaiser resented Von Hindenburg's growing popularity as the hero of the Battle of Tannenberg.

Advertisement of Wallace's newsreel featuring Von Hindenburg. Source: *Moving Picture World*, 13 March 1915
Link to high res image

In Wallace's film Von Hindenburg can be seen in the middle, flanked on the left by his second in command General Erich Ludendorff. To the right is Lieutenant Colonel Max Hoffmann, the officer who prepared the master plan for the Eighth German Army to encircle and annihilate the invading Russian forces in East Prussia at Tannenberg in August 1914.

Wallace's historical film has been uploaded on our YouTube channel. We added contemporary German music - *Prussia's Glory* - to the clip.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 12:30 PM No comments:

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Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2016

Capturing Lenin and Trotzky

In a previous weblog we mentioned Donald C. Thompson's photographic assignment for *Leslie's Weekly* in Russia when he captured the leading politicians, filmed the demonstrations in the streets of Petrograd and in July 1917 went to the front to cover the summer offensive against the German army. Thompson's films were edited into his movie *The German Curse in Russia*.

Caption from Thompson's book: "Here we see Lenin (far left) with his friend Trotzky carrying wreaths to place on the graves of those whom the latter called 'glorious martyrs of freedom.'"

Thompson also claimed to have photographed Lenin and Trotzky on July 15, 1917. Here is his personal account as published in his book *Donald Thompson in Russia* (1918).

> *I went out to Lenine's place and tried to see him and make a picture of him. I saw him after a wait of two hours and asked him to pose for a picture. When Boris told him I was from America, he told Boris to tell me he would have nothing to do with me and that we had better leave Petrograd.*
>
> *I told Boris to tell him that I was not going to leave Petrograd and that I would stay as long as I wished. I have made photographs of Lenine and a man named Trotzky who has come from New York. Trotzky I find a very mysterious man. He does not commit himself.*

Major Scoop

Thompson claimed to have secured a major scoop with his pictures, saying he was the first foreign cameraman to have taken photographs of these historical Bolshevik leaders. In a recent post on Internet Mike Carey examined Thompson's photographic work and clearly demonstrated that despite a certain similarity these men were definitely not Lenin and Trotzky. The reasons for Thompson's misrepresentation are not known. But considering his love for self-promotion the urge to stage some breaking news pictures may have been irresistable to Thompson.

Mike Carey's post can be read here.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:00 AM No comments:

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2016

Now Available - How Sir Roger Casement Was Filmed (1915)

As previewed in this weblog, the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television* has published an article on how the only extant footage of Irish nationalist Sir Roger Casement was filmed during World War I. The article by authors Cooper C. Graham and Ron van Dopperen has been published online at the website of Taylor & Francis. The story will be published in print later this year.

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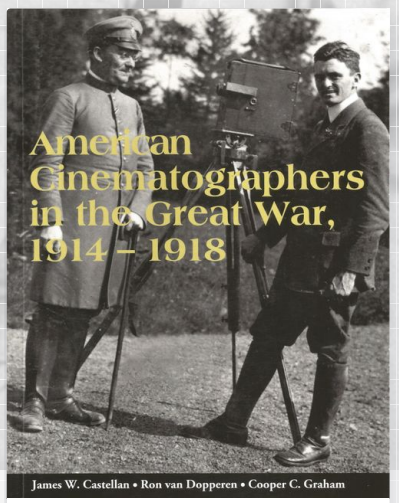

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Abstract

Here is a short summary of the article:

Roger Casement, photographed by Albert Dawson in Berlin, April 1915
Link to high res image

On 4 August 1916, the day after Roger Casement was executed, the Hearst International Film Pictorial Newsreel released moving pictures of Sir Roger at his writing desk. Although Hearst claimed that the films were shot in Belgium, they had been shot in Germany the year before. The authors have found the original film at the Library of Congress in the John E. Allen collection. A copy of the film has also surfaced in a British documentary series on World War I, from where it was posted on YouTube. But there was no information on how the film was shot in 1915 or the story behind it. The authors have also searched the provenance of the film. The story involves two Americans, Franz Hugo Krebs, journalist, and Albert K. Dawson, cinematographer, in the sad episode of Casement in Germany prior to the Easter rising of 1916 and his trial in London. Casement had been trying to enlist the Germans' support in a general rising against England and the raising of an Irish Brigade. He had quickly found out that the Germans were simply using him for propaganda purposes. Nevertheless, he decided to assist Krebs and Dawson in their use of photography for his own propaganda aims. Aside from its undisputed propaganda value, the photo and film session became an important document of Casement's life. Today, Casement receives increasing attention for his heroic struggle to speak out against all wrongs, not just those committed against Ireland. These films and photographs are in part a testament to this struggle.

A copy of the full story can read and downloaded here.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:22 AM No comments:

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Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

TUESDAY, JANUARY 26, 2016

Donald C. Thompson's "War As It Really Is" (USA, 1916)

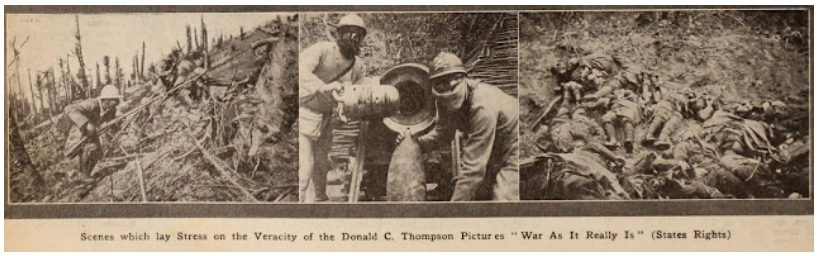
First shown at the prestigious Rialto in New York City in October 1916, Donald C. Thompson's seven reel feature film *War As It Really Is* was a self-made project. Produced and marketed by the Donald C. Thompson Company, in collaboration with *Leslie's Weekly*, the film showed some of the most gruesome sights of the Great War.

Intertitle from Thompson's film *War As It Really Is* (1916)

"In the Jaws of Death"

"Much detail is clearly screened in the corpses and skeletons piled about deserted fortifications", commented a review by *Motion Picture News*. Starting with some remarkable aerial views of the Entente fleet at Thessaloniki, Thompson's film covered the western front from the French side. Press reports indicated he was at the Somme battlefield on July 2, 1916, when he was severely wounded by by a piece of shell. A print of the movie has survived in the U.S. Signal Corps collection of the National Archives in Washington, DC. To give an idea of the frontline footage we have uploaded scenes on YouTube from reel 7 following the intertitle "In the Jaws of Death", showing a French infantry attack on the German lines under heavy artillery fire. The film clip has been edited with a contemporary score by composer Gustav Holst from his musical suite *The Planets/Mars*.

Here is a link to these scenes from Thompson's war movie.



Scenes from *War As It Really Is*. Source: *Motion Picture News*, 23 December 1916
Link to trade paper article

Thompson's war films have been described in more detail in our latest book *American Cinematographers in the Great War.*

Also, here is a download link to the production file of Thompson's war movie, from the collection of the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

Postscript

In 2021, Thompson's World War I film *War As It Really Is* was colorized and enhanced by artificial intelligence. Also, a modern musical score was added to this new film version. The results are simply astonishing.

Here is the link to this revamped war film on the YouTube channel of *Random Strange History TV*.

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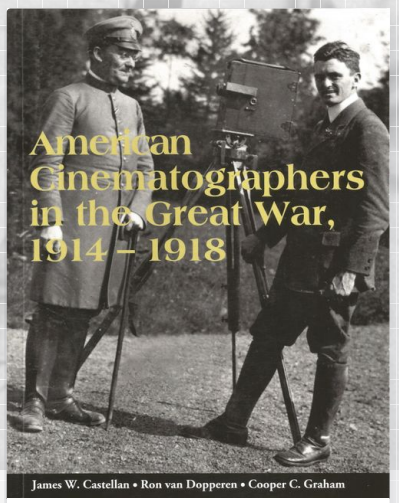

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World War I Combat Camera Edwin F. Weigle Found!

Anatomy of an Authentic World War I Combat Scene (1915)

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Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:20 AM No comments:

MONDAY, JANUARY 18, 2016

Merl laVoy Revisited (1916)

American cinematographer Merl laVoy featured before in this weblog. Last year we published on our discovery of footage from his first film, *Heroic France* (1917). Apart from this World War I film, a series of still photographs taken by LaVoy for this same assignment has also been retrieved.

Merl LaVoy, at left, and a French soldier, near the trenches of Verdun.

The Movie Machine Gunner

A new hero of the great war who has captured thousands single handed—in his camera.

By Roger Packard

EVERY war has its heroes whose deeds of valor set fire to a country's imagination. But always there is the element of "the fighting chance" in these acts of courage, because the soldier who performs them is prepared to strike back at his foe with weapons best suited to the emergency. History must give place, in its records of bravery, to a new type of hero who endures the hardships and dangers of battle without even "a bare bodkin" to use for self-defense. In this latter class the first candidate for honors is Merl

Merl laVoy (left) with French soldier near Verdun, 1916. Colorized picture, copied from *Picture-Play Magazine*, September 1917
Link to high res image

Special Camera Frame Size

Author Cooper C. Graham located these pictures online. Most of the photographs have a copyright reference to LaVoy and bear a close match to the film scenes shot by LaVoy for his movie *Heroic France*. The LaVoy pictures from this period are also interesting because these were shot on a camera with an unusual frame size. In inches, it comes out to 7 inches by 11 inches, a ratio of almost two to one, which means that the pictures look elongated horizontally or vertically.

Here are LaVoy's World War I pictures from France with the original captions, as written on the backside of the prints.

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Telephone station at big guns, in communication with observers. *"Heroic France"/ The Allies in Action*

First line trench. No reference to LaVoy, but similar to film scene from *Heroic France*

Returning empty 75 mm shells for reloading. Copyright Merl laVoy

Cemetary at the front. Note (c) LaVoy

Firing at enemy airplane. Note (c) LaVoy

Photograph of General Marie Émile Fayolle by LaVoy. The general was the commander of the Sixth Army at the Somme while LaVoy was shooting film in France

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:00 AM No comments:

MONDAY, JANUARY 4, 2016

Fake the Footage!

Ever since films were first made war scenes have been staged before the movie camera. The expert in this field is no doubt film historian Stephen Bottomore. In his doctoral thesis *Filming, faking and propaganda: The origins of the war film, 1897-1902*, Bottomore presented the first detailed treatment of war and early cinema, describing the representation of conflicts in film from the Greco-Turkish War of 1897 through the Spanish-American War, Boer War, and others up to about 1902.

German infantry attack, captured by Albert K. Dawson. YouTube link to movie scene

Bottomore clearly demonstrated that in attempting to cover these events, early filmmakers faced a difficult task, for warfare at the end of the 19th century was changing, relying more on defence and concealment and less on highly visible offensives; there was also increasing regulation and censorship of reporting. With the new tactics making battle less visible, and with increasing official controls, how could wars be represented on film? Surprisingly, in just half a decade, filmmakers found ways to cope, by developing new 'genres' of films such as acted fakes, and new exhibition strategies, and in these ways managed to present wars to the public of the time fairly effectively.

German Infantry Charge

As we found during our research on the American cinematographers of the First World War, the situation in 1914-1918 had not changed much. As an example, here is a video showing how Albert K. Dawson staged a German infantry attack on the Western Front in February 1915:

Trench warfare in World War I didn't make for very exciting action scenes. With their bulky cameras and heavy tripods, and with no zoom lenses available to get closer to the actual scene, camera operators frequently decided to stage events. The classic scene from *The Battle of the Somme* (1916) - showing British soldiers going over the top - was filmed at a trench mortar school well behind the firing lines. By comparing film scenes with still photographs and press reports, we discovered American cinematographers sometimes used the same techniques.

On the other hand, the reasons for staging war scenes were complex. Since cinematographers such as Durborough and Dawson had great difficulty in getting to the front and then getting their actual combat footage past the censors, does this partially excuse their behaviour? As Signal Corps cameraman Joe Hubbel said: "Our idea was to make up propaganda films to show what we were doing. On one occasion they had hospital trains near us that could run up to the front and bring back the wounded. We took a company of men, bandaged them up and laid them in the sun on stretchers and loaded the train. I was brought up on charges that I was faking it. Well, that wasn't a good word. I was representing an occasion that you wouldn't take the chance with a lot of wounded men. And it looked the same."

This raises the question and it is a significant one: when is a re-enactment justified? The question is especially important when the documentary filmmaker is making a work that is designed to persuade the viewer to fight and die for a cause.

The website Smithsonian.com has more on the early history of faking war films.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 4:51 PM 1 comment:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company*. James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2015

Germany's Official World War I Film Squads

From November 1916 the German government took control of all film activities, culminating in the incorporation of the *Universum Film AG* (UFA) as authorized by General Ludendorff. As descibed in our latest book, the German military leaders from the start of the war were reluctant to allow cinematographers to go to the front. But now finally film was recognized as an important medium for publicity. As a result eight so-called *Film Truppen* were established. These film squads consisted of official military cameramen who were attached to various German army groups.

German cinema team. Western front, June 1917. Colorized picture from the collection of the Imperial War Museum.
Link to original low res image

Hans Barkhausen in his book on German film propaganda during World War I and II calculated that these military cameramen in 1917-1918 produced over 10.000 photographs. The list of motion pictures that they made also is impressive. Most of these pictures have been lost, but the German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv) still have about 1.000 photographs made in the last two years of the Great War by these military cameramen. Never properly researched before a selection of these pictures was recently copied and turned over to the Imperial War Museum in London, as part of an exchange program.

Flying Circus

The German military film squads were organized along the lines of the Imperial airforce. Like the "Red Baron" von Richthoven's flying circus, these cameramen moved around from one front sector to another. Take for instance Film Squad No. 1 which started covering the war on the Mediterranean shore, found itself on the western front in March 1917, went to Romania five months later and from the beginning of 1918 filmed in Tiflis, the new capital of Georgia that had been set up by the Germans as a separate state after Russia had withdrawn from the war at the Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

As the war expanded and Germany conquered large chunks of territory on the eastern front the German film squads went to the Caucasus mountains, the interior of Turkey, the Black Sea coast and even as far as the deserts of Palestine to film the German side of the war. A regular film squad was commanded by a lieutenant and consisted of two still photographers, a cinematographer and an assistant film camera operator.

We have uploaded a collection of pictures, showing these official German cameramen at work on our Flickr photo account.

Also, here is a video showing these photographers at work recording military history with their camera. Contemporary German music has been added to the clip.

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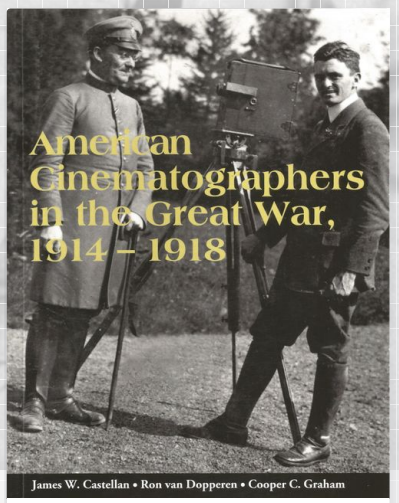

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Germany's Official World War I Film Squads
The Great War Day by Day
Signal Corps Scoop - Capturing the Big Four at

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:00 AM 2 comments:

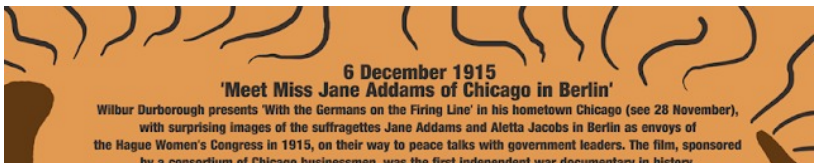
MONDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2015

The Great War Day by Day

To commemorate the centennial of the first exhibition on November 28, 1915 of Wilbur Durborough's World War I film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* weblog The Great War Day by Day has dedicated two remarkable illustrations to this movie which has been recently restored by the Library of Congress. The illustrations were drawn by a Dutch artist, Tim Broekhuizen. You will find more information on this historical World War I feature documentary in this weblog, as well as in our latest book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*.

28 November 1915 - 'With the Germans on the Firing Line' by W.H. Durborough

The film opened in Milwaukee on November 28, 1915. It opened in Chicago on December 6, 1915. The net profits of the showings at the Park Theater in Chicago were to go to the American Red Cross for use in war-stricken countries without discrimination. Durborough lectured during some of the showings.



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6 December 1915 - 'Meet Miss Jane Addams of Chicago in Berlin'

Wilbur Durborough presents 'With the Germans on the Firing Line' in his hometown Chicago (see 28 November), with surprising images of the suffragettes Jane Addams and Aletta Jacobs in Berlin as envoys of the Hague Women's Congress in 1915, on their way to peace talks with government leaders. The film, sponsored by a consortium of Chicago businessmen, was the first independent war documentary in history.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 12:37 AM No comments:

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2015

Signal Corps Scoop - Capturing the Big Four at Versailles (1919)

The Treaty of Versailles not only put an official end to World War I. The international conference was also a major media event that attracted a huge amount of publicity. Edward Jackson and Victor Kubes, two American cameramen from the U.S. Signal Corps, on this historical occasion scooped all journalists when in May 1919 they captured the four leading statesmen from France, Italy, Britain and the U.S.A. for an exclusive photo and film opportunity.

Left: Cinematographer 2nd Lt. Victor O. Kubes and Cpt. Edward N. Jackson on board *SS George Washington,* July 1919. Right: Edward N. Jackson, February 1919. Photos from the Signal Corps Collection, National Archives
Link to high res image left
Link to high res image right

Film history traditionally refers to cinematographer and movie director Victor Fleming as President Wilson's official cameraman on his first trip to Europe, when Wilson was working on cementing his ideal about a League of Nations for generations to come. Fleming's role is well documented in Michael Sragow's study on Fleming's work during World War I. But who remembers the story on the two cameramen who after Fleming's discharge from the U.S. Signal Corps in March 1919 took up where he had left off? They would be responsible for some of the most iconic pictures that have been taken of the Treaty of Versailles and of the politicians who played a leading role at this historical conference.

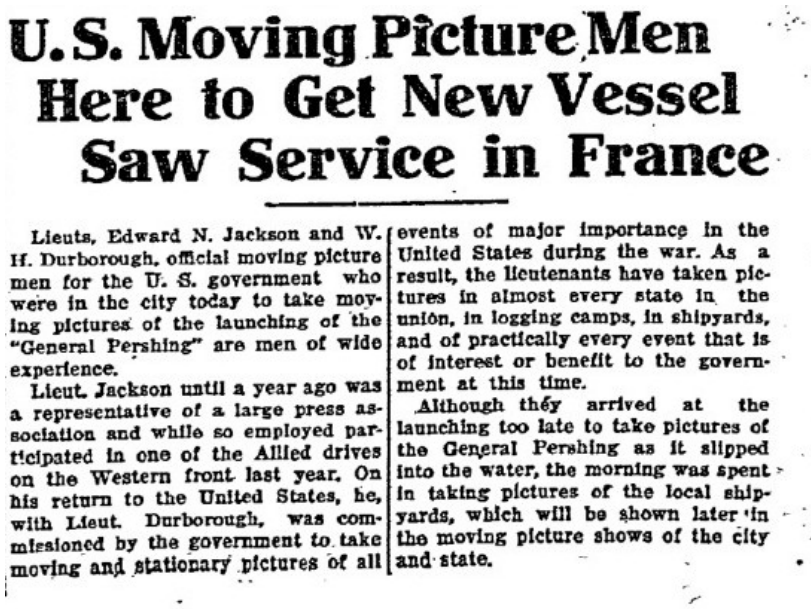
Edward Jackson

The first man who needs to be credited here is "Eddie" Jackson. Born in Philadelphia in 1885, Jackson's photographs included seven U.S. Presidents, as many kings, one pope, three queens, ten thousand beautiful women, three hundred murderers, most of the world's great diplomats and generals, pickpockets, gunmen, drug peddlers and their victims. We mentioned Jackson briefly in our book *American Cinematographer in the Great War* because he

"Eddie" Jackson with Graflex camera. Source: www.ctevans.net

worked together with Wilbur H. Durborough who had filmed in wartime Germany in 1915. Durborough reportedly qualified Jackson as one of the most agressive press photographers in the United States. As will be shown when he covered Versailles, Jackson was out to get the best pictures and he wasn't the type to let himself be disappointed by anyone. He had learnt his trade in the streets of New York City where he would stalk his newsworthy subjects all over town. From 1912 Jackson was a freelancer for the American Press Association.

Jackson was with Durborough when they worked together for the U.S. Signal Corps in Washington state at Fort Lewis. According to the *Seattle Daily Times* of January 6, 1918, films and still photographs were made of the soldiers training for war, including a sham battle that was staged for their camera. Although Durborough doesn't mention him in his manuscript, located in the Manuscripts division of the Library of Congress, contemporary press reports (reproduced in Joseph Caro's book on Jackson) indicate Jackson worked as a still photographer, while Durborough appears to have cranked the movie camera, filming scenes how Fort Lewis would be defended if attacked. While on the West Coast Jackson and Durborough also made some Seattle area shipyard films. Here is a press report on their joint work filming the American naval program:



U.S. Moving Picture Men Here to Get New Vessel Saw Service in France

Lieuts. Edward N. Jackson and W. H. Durborough, official moving picture men for the U. S. government who were in the city today to take moving pictures of the launching of the "General Pershing" are men of wide experience.

Lieut. Jackson until a year ago was a representative of a large press association and while so employed participated in one of the Allied drives on the Western front last year. On his return to the United States, he, with Lieut. Durborough, was commissioned by the government to take moving and stationary pictures of all events of major importance in the United States during the war. As a result, the lieutenants have taken pictures in almost every state in the union, in logging camps, in shipyards, and of practically every event that is of interest or benefit to the government at this time.

Although they arrived at the launching too late to take pictures of the General Pershing as it slipped into the water, the morning was spent in taking pictures of the local shipyards, which will be shown later in the moving picture shows of the city and state.

***Olympia Record*, January 15, 1918. The article is wrong on asserting Jackson had covered the Western front in 1917.**

Victor Kubes

Somewhat later, in March 1918, Durborough and Jackson worked together on producing aerial pictures at Camp Kearny in San Diego. These were all photographic assignments for the Committee on Public Information (CPI), America's wartime propaganda agency. In August 1918 Jackson was transferred to Europe to cover the war with the 27th Division. Not much is known about the personal background of Jackson's colleague, cinematographer Victor Kubes, except that he was a press photographer from New York. He started working for the Hearst newspapers. *Moving Picture World* in an article published on March 18, 1916, refers to him as a newsreel cameraman for the *Hearst-Vitagraph News Pictorial*, working in the Chicago area. Kubes was later transferred to Cleveland, Ohio, and when war broke out between America and Germany he joined the U.S. Signal Corps. Kubes is also listed as a staff member of the Students Army Training Corps of Columbia University in 1918. Columbia University from January 1918 hosted a training school for land photography for the Signal Corps, so he probably taught photography there. Unlike Jackson, who followed the retreating German army in the final months of the war, Kubes had no frontline experience. He was shipped to Europe in December 1918 on the *SS George Washington* to cover President Wilson's visit to Europe. Kubes probably worked with Victor Fleming on his first pictorial assignments in and around Paris in early 1919.

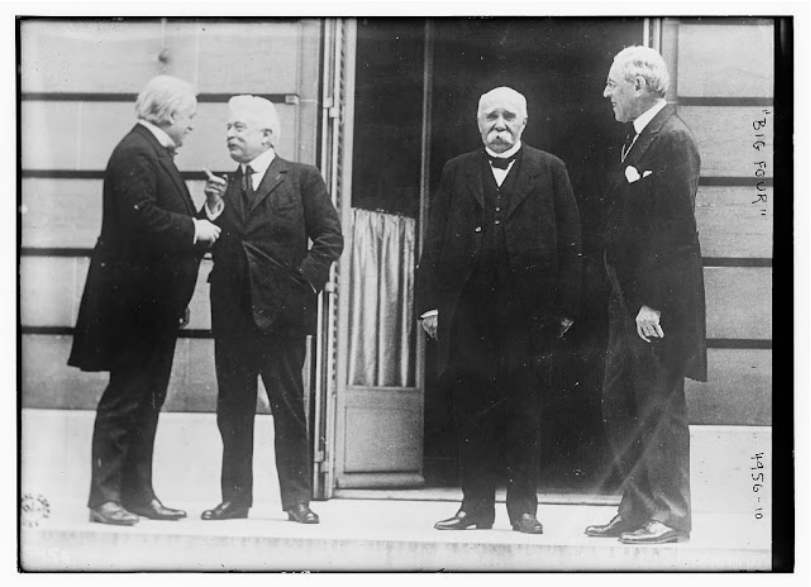
Jackson states he was assigned as the official American Expeditionary Force photographer to Woodrow Wilson's Presidential Party overseas and the Peace Conference at the close of the war. His own story can be read in this weblog in more detail. Although it overlaps with Fleming's claim to fame it is evident from the pictures that he took as well as Jackson's own account that he photographed Wilson's party as early as December 1918 when Wilson first landed in Brest, France. Jackson followed the Presidential party on its visit to Paris, Rome and London.

Here is a link to one of Jackson's pictures showing some of his fellow Signal Corps cameramen covering Wilson's visit to Rome.

Biggest Scoop

Jackson's biggest scoop came during Wilson's second trip to Europe in May 1919 when together with Victor Kubes he cunningly "fixed" a photo and film opportunity and captured the four leading statesmen at Versailles: Wilson (USA), Lloyd George (Britain), Orlando (Italy) and Clemenceau (France) who a few weeks before had presented their controversial peace plan, much to Germany's indignation and anger.

In Jackson's own words and as published on December 29, 1922 by the *American Legion Weekly*, here is how they made these historical pictures:



The Big Four at Versailles. May 27, 1919. U.S. Signal Corps photograph from the Library of Congress, taken by Edward Jackson. Digital ID: ggbain 29038

Of the best and most important photographs I obtained as photographer of the presidential party were two beauties of the Big Four—Wilson, Lloyd George, Orlando and Clemenceau. And heaven bless Lloyd George on that occasion! The wonderful little Welshman turned out to be my best assistant.

I had long urged Admiral Grayson to fix things for me with the President to get the four leading statesmen of the world grouped in a photograph. The official photographers of all the Allies were asking for it. Admiral Grayson finally took the matter up with Mr. Wilson and I was told the Big Four were to hold a "little, private meeting" at the "White House" next morning and that then, if all consented, I should get my opportunity.

I went there accompanied by Lieut. Victor Kubes, a moving picture operator. But it was up to me to do the fixing. He was my entire "unit" on the President's second European journey, though in case of need I could always call on the Signal Corps for assistance. I was admitted to the Murat mansion readily enough, but with some hesitation by the guards into the salon where the council was to be held. It was empty. However, as I was surveying the room there came a footfall which brought me to attention with a snap. For I had by this time come to recognize the President's step.

"Good morning, Captain," said Mr. Wilson, walking over to a table, opening a big steel box and delving into the papers inside. "What are you after now?"

"There is a great demand, sir, from all countries for a photograph of the Council of Four. I believe Admiral Grayson spoke to you about my getting it here today."

"All right," he smiled, "I'll try and corral them for you. But it may prove a hard thing to do."

Fully fifteen minutes passed before Lloyd George, Clemenceau and Orlando arrived.

"Ah, good morning, Captain."

That greeting came from Lloyd George. He remembered me clearly because the first time I came to his notice he had, I'm pretty sure, an uneasy feeling for about a minute that I might be

an assassin. On my way to Paris from Saint Germain on a morning a week before I had spied the Premier taking a walk in a park. His motor car trailed him while he exercised. He was walking directly toward me, a British civilian guard a little behind him. I told my driver to stop. I particularly wanted a full figure portrait of the great little man. Of all the photographs I'd made of him, I had none from head to feet.

My car did not stop until it had swept fifty feet past the Premier. I jumped out, running back to a cross road where I saw his auto waiting. Within fifteen feet I turned with my camera adjusted.

Foolishly, I hadn't up to this time opened my mouth. I thought, however, my uniform would be sufficient introduction. But the Premier frowned, looked somewhat startled and fell back while his guard stepped swiftly in front of him and began to draw his hand from the right hand side pocket of his coat.

"I am only an American army photographer," I hastened to say, "an Army photographer accompanying President Wilson. I haven't anything to shoot worse than a camera."

I said this more to the guard than the Premier who, however, burst out laughing and stepped forward voluntarily to pose.

Afterward he asked to examine my camera which, he said, was much different in construction from British cameras.

I was glad I had made something of a lasting impression on him that day, because if it hadn't been for him on this following occasion I might not have got any pictures of the Big Four at all.

President Wilson said he feared there would not be sufficient light in the room, but I think he did so because M. Clemenceau wasn't taking the matter very cheerfully. The latter seemed to express by his shaggy brows and set face that he didn't care for the interruption in the work of state.

Lloyd George spoke up, however.

"Oh, yes," he said, "I think the captain will be able to picture us all right if we pose for him for a time exposure."

"A two second snap, Mr. President," I urged, "will do it very well."

Orlando was smiling as well as the President and Lloyd George, so Clemenceau made no demur and took his seat as I placed the four chairs in a row. I made two pictures.

Outside, however, was Lieutenant Kubes with his movie camera—right outside in the rose garden, and there was a ready exit from the room through one of the long French windows. So I made a little speech.

"Gentlemen," I said, "official representatives of all your countries have been requesting the American Government to arrange for several photographs of you together. It would be a great favor to all if you would step outside—just outside this window, where I have a moving picture operator stationed, and give him an opportunity—just a few seconds of your time—to take an animated photograph. It is asking a great favor, I know, but the picture will be very valuable to the public."

The President smiled tolerantly but half doubtfully, Lloyd George (bless him!) jumped from his chair and said:

"Why, of course, by all means, Cap-

tain. Only make it as quickly as you can. And now," said the British Premier, turning laughingly to the

President, "what do you know about moving picture acting?"

Mr. Wilson shook his head.

"Captain Jackson," said Lloyd George, "you will have to instruct us."

So then I grouped Lloyd George and Signor Orlando and asked them at the word to simulate a lively conversation. The Italian Premier was smiling and agreeable, and he and Lloyd George got right into the thing, as the photograph I am printing here will show. The President was willing enough and tried to start a talk with Clemenceau, but, as the picture further shows, the Tiger went dead on his hands and stood squarefooted, stock still, staring at the camera, while President Wilson looked over at the histrionic efforts of Lloyd George and Orlando and burst into laughter.

Next day I went after Joffre. The fine old Marshal of France received me in his quarters. I asked him for a bust picture.

"Any pose from the chest up," said Joffre. "No lower, for I am a vain old man and would not have my big stomach show."

When I returned with the pictures later he was so pleased with them, despite the fact that his stomach did show somewhat, that, without request of mine, he autographed a print and handed it back to me and patted my shoulder as I bowed my way out.

(*To be concluded*)

Apart from Jackson's historical photographs, Kubes' film showing the "Big Four" has also been preserved and can be seen online in contemporary newsreel segments which were found by author Cooper C. Graham in the CBS Collection at the National Archives in Washington, NWDNM (M) CBS-CBS-WW1-, National Archives identifier 89349, record number CBS-WW1-229.

The historical scene showing Wilson, Clemenceau, Lloyd George and Orlando finally found its way in Episode 24 of the CBS *World War I* series, no doubt taken from the original Signal Corps footage shot by Kubes. Here is a short clip:

The two Signal Corps cameramen stayed in France until the conclusion of the peace treaty meetings. Although cameras were strictly forbidden, Kubes and Jackson managed to cover the arrival of the German delegation at Versailles. Jackson claimed he forged a special pass on White House stationary, which enabled him and Kubes to capture this scene:

Source: ***U.S. Official Pictures of the World War*** **(1920)**

When on June 28, 1919, in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles the Peace Treaty was signed, Jackson and Kubes were present again to record the event.

After the Great War

After the Great War Kubes became a newsreel cameraman for Fox News. In November 1919 he went to Soviet Russia for Fox and brought back some remarkable motion pictures of Lenin. Jackson's star had also risen as a result of his wartime work for the U.S. Signal Corps. He was promoted to Captain in the Signal Corps. After his return to America, in July 1919, he became the lead news photographer for the *New York Daily News* and stayed with this newspaper until his retirement, covering events like the first flights across the Atlantic and the Depression in the 1930s. Jackson died in Wilton, Connecticut, in 1967.

For more information on Jackson's remarkable life and career here is a link to a biographical website by Joseph J. Caro who has written a series of books on Jackson's photographic work. These are all available on Amazon. Caro's volume on Jackson's experiences during World War I can be ordered here. It is an extraordinary book with many pictures by Jackson, as well as cites from his personal journal that is now in the family archives.

Jackson's story as printed in the *American Legion Weekly* on his photographic work during the Versailles Peace Treaty conference can be read and downloaded here.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:30 AM No comments:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2015

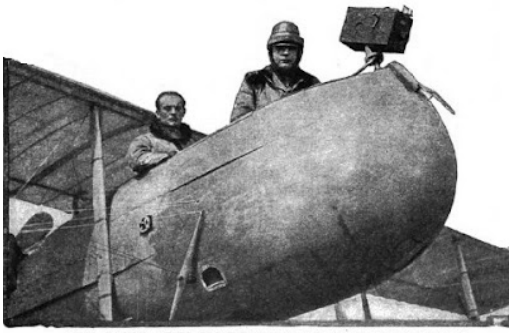
Found! Merl laVoy's "Heroic France" (USA, 1917)

Long considered lost, Merl la Voy's war film *Heroic France* (USA, 1917) has been partially retrieved by authors Cooper C. Graham and Ron van Dopperen. La Voy is credited as the only civilian cinematographer from the United States who filmed on the battlefields of the Somme and Verdun with the French army. The authors located four reels of La Voy's war footage, including some fascinating aerial pictures taken above the frontline and scenes showing a German gas attack on the Western Front.

Merl la Voy, circa 1920

"The Modern Marco Polo"

Motion picture cameraman Merl la Voy (1885-1953) traveled the four corners of the world for Pathé, earning him the title of the Modern Marco Polo. His adventures during the First World War are described in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*. When we finished this project, we closed our book with a final observation saying none of la Voy's World War I films had been found. We were wrong about this. On the Internet we located a collection of World War I newsreel segments which could be traced to the CBS Collection at the National Archives in Washington, DC. The intertitle references to La Voy pointed to *Heroic France*, his first war film made in 1917. We were able to confirm this by checking contemporary reviews for this film.



MERL LA VOY, AFTER FLIGHT OVER PARIS IN MILITARY BIPLANE

Merl LaVoy after flight over Paris in military airplane. Reproduced from *Motion Picture Magazine*, August 1917.

Link to high res scan trade paper article

Merl la Voy filmed with the French army in 1916. On his return to America his film was first shown in Chicago on March 19, 1917. *Heroic France* was sponsored by a group of pro-French business men from Chicago and exhibitions supported war charity organizations such as the American Red Cross and the American Relief Clearing House. This eight-reel movie was released nationwide in June 1917 by Mutual, shortly after the American intervention in the Great War. The footage that we found comes from reels 3, 4, 5 and 6. It has a total playtime of a little over 35 minutes. The inclusion of pictures showing the Serbian army, as well as the double "5 Series", showing both aerial scenes and footage from the French front on the same reel, is intriguing. La Voy in 1917 went to Serbia for the Red Cross where he shot film at the front. These observations suggest that the four reels found with film from *Heroic France* had been re-edited by La Voy at a later date, perhaps for lectures.

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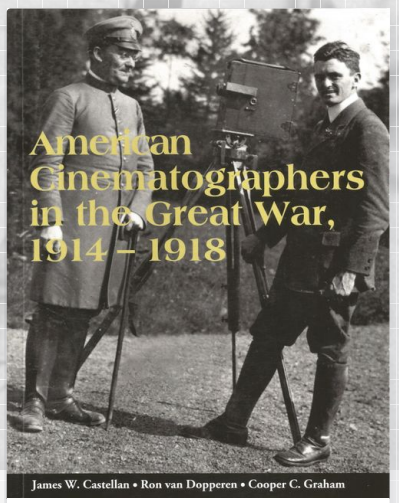

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Anatomy of an Authentic World War I Combat Scene (1915)

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► 2018 (50)
► 2017 (56)
► 2016 (30)
▼ 2015 (37)
► December (3)
▼ November (3)
Found! Merl laVoy's "Heroic France" (USA, 1917)
Lest We Forget - The Final Pictures of Lt. Ralph

German prisoners of war, gathering grain, 1916. Colorized photograph by Merl la Voy. Author's collection.
Link to original high res image

CBS Series on World War I

CBS obtained the original footage from the Sherman Grinberg Collection while assembling film for their World War I TV series in 1964. After the series was edited CBS in a magnificent gesture turned its unused footage over to the National Archives - a real boon for researchers. We also found scenes in the CBS episode on Verdun from this series, which were probably taken by la Voy, featuring the American Lafayette Escadrille pilots who had volunteered to fight for France. Famous aces such as Raoul Lufberry who had been filmed by la Voy appear in this CBS episode, together with his pet lions Whiskey and Soda.

Gardening at the front, 1916. Photograph by Merl la Voy. Author's collection.

Getting mail in the trenches, 1916. Photograph by Merl la Voy. Author's collection.
Link to print from trade paper *Motography*

We have edited these CBS scenes into the video on our YouTube channel, showing all of la Voy's World War I films that we found, rearranged according to the orginal series of numbers of the reels and scenes on the intertitles.

E...
Walter Niebuhr and "Pershing's Crusaders" (USA, 1918)
► October (5)
► September (4)
► August (7)
► July (2)
► June (6)
► May (2)
► April (1)
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Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:03 AM 2 comments:

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2015

Lest We Forget - The Final Pictures of Lt. Ralph E. Estep (November 1918)

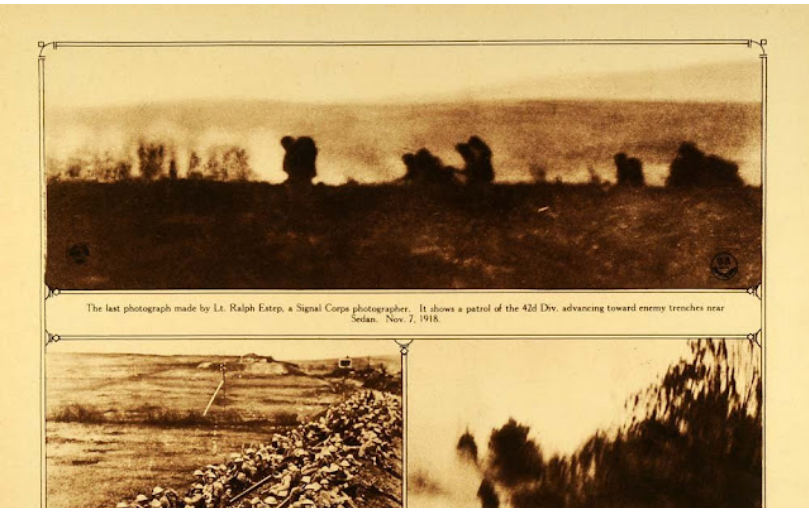
Ralph E. Estep, 29 October 1918, Dricourt, French Ardennes, eight days before his death. Colorized picture.
Link to original high res image

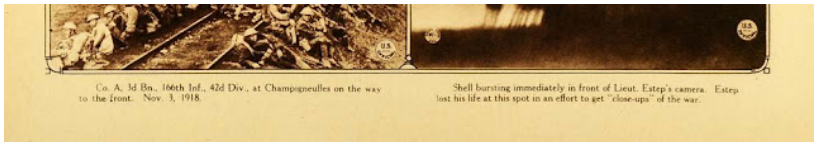
Exactly 97 years ago and just four days before the Armistice, on November 7, 1918, while on a photographic assignment with the 42nd "Rainbow" Division near Sedan, Lieutenant Ralph Edwin Estep was killed in action by a German high explosive shell. He was the only military photographer in the U.S. Army Signal Corps during World War I who was mortally wounded. The pictures in his camera recorded his final moments in life.

Not much is known about Estep's background. He probably was born in Winona Lake, Indiana, where at his local high school a memorial tablet was placed to commemorate his untimely death. In 1915, before America entered the Great War, Estep was sent to Europe by *Leslie's Weekly* to cover the war with the Serbian army. He also was sent to France and appears to have reported on the war at the Italian front. When the United States entered the First World War in 1917 Estep enlisted with the 36th Division and he later was made a Signal Corps photographer. In the Signal Corps collection at the National Archives in Washington, DC., there is a picture taken by Estep in the fall of 1918, showing the 78th Division Photo Unit making pictures of a bridge that had been destroyed by the retreating German army over the Aire River near Grandpre in the French Ardennes. We also found this newspaper story on Estep's photographic work near Verdun in October 1918.

Last War Pictures

On November 7, 1918, Estep was near Sedan capturing still photographs with his plate camera of a patrol by a unit of the 42nd "Rainbow" Division into the German lines. The weather was cloudy, it was around 5 PM, dusk was already falling. This was the moment the Germans started shelling the American soldiers in front of him and Estep's camera recorded the men running for cover. There were casualties among the American soldiers and Estep's final picture shows a huge column of flying earth as a result of a shell exploding in front of him. A few minutes later he was dead.





Co. A, 3d Bn., 166th Inf., 42d Div., at Champagneulles on the way to the front. Nov. 3, 1918.

Shell bursting immediately in front of Lieut. Estep's camera. Estep lost his life at this spot in an effort to get "close-ups" of the war.

Link to high res image of Estep's last photograph (top)

Lieutenant Estep's death was described by *Stars and Strips* in more detail on November 28, 1918:

CAMERA MAN KILLED, PLATES GIVE UP TALE

Lieut. Estep Photographs Hill Which Quickly Becomes His Grave

DIES IN SIGHT OF SEDAN

Pictures Reveal Drama of Bursting Shells and Crawling Men Above Deadly Valley

In the dark room of a photographic laboratory near Paris this week two sensitized gelatine plates gave up the secret of the last minutes of Lieut. Ralph Estep, who was killed within sight of Sedan after he had faced death almost daily for three months so that millions of people could see through the eye of his camera what modern war is like.

Gradually taking on lights and shadows, the two plates showed the crest of a barren hill with shells bursting and casting up great spouts of earth, and just beyond the crest a valley black with the shadows of late afternoon, a valley that holds Lieut. Estep's grave.

Lieut. Estep had snapped the photographs a few moments before another one of those big shells burst and left him lifeless at the side of his camera and plate pack. That was about 5 p.m. of November 7—three days before the last guns of the war were fired.

A dozen penciled lines in his notebook, titles for the dozen pictures he had taken just before he was killed, make complete the story that the last photographs tell. He had written titles for every plate by numbers, and Plates No. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 showed the platoon forming for the reconnaissance. Plate No. 6 pictured a "slight brush," the first sight of the enemy.

Writes: "Men Crawling"

The dramatic climax was shown in Plates 11 and 12, his last ones, and in his note book the record stands:

11.—Burst—Killed.

12.—Men crawling.

The pictures were all taken on a cloudy day and are full of shadows, with little contrast, and 11 shows only the edge of the hill and the huge funnel-shaped shell burst. The word "killed" probably referred to what he had seen happen to the men just ahead of him. Picture No. 12 shows another huge column of flying earth with a line of doughboys dimly silhouetted against the darkness of the valley.

The last writing on the page—the lieutenant's last words were simply: "Nov. 7—Pack 16." Lieutenant Estep

had reloaded his camera just before he fell.

Lieut. Estep's death is only one of the casualities among the 100 Signal Corps officers and men who have been taking still and motion pictures of the fighting Americans. One other photographer was dangerously wounded and six others were wounded more or less seriously. Another camera man, who had been listed as killed, has just been accounted for as a prisoner of war through a postcard he mailed from a German prison camp, asking his buddy to send him his heavy sweater.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 1:26 AM No comments:

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2015

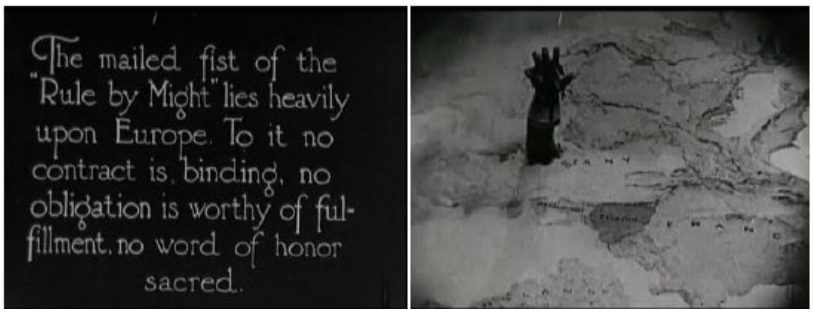
Walter Niebuhr and "Pershing's Crusaders" (USA, 1918)

America's first official war film, *Pershing's Crusaders* (1918), has a stunning opening scene by Walter Niebuhr. As mentioned before in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*, we wouldn't have found out about this remarkable footage if it hadn't been for Dr. William G. Chrystal who has studied the Niebuhr family for over 35 years and is an authority on theologian and political philosopher Reinhold Niebuhr. Many thanks, Bill, for providing us with your astonishing research material!

Walter Niebuhr (second from right) on the Eastern Front. Colorized picture, reproduced from film frame *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (USA, 1915)

Born in 1890, Walter Niebuhr was a journalist from Illinois. In 1915 he went to Germany to cover the First World War. On his visits to the eastern front Niebuhr frequently accompanied cinematographer Wilbur Durborough, and he also appears in his film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* which was recently restored by the Library of Congress. After America entered the Great War, Niebuhr was named Associate Director of George Creel's Commitee on Public Information's Division of Film. It was Niebuhr's job to produce America's first war films.

The iconic movie poster as well as the opening shots of *Pershing's Crusaders* (1918) were all based on work by Walter Niebuhr.



German "Rule by Might", designed and played by Walter Niebuhr

Opening Shots

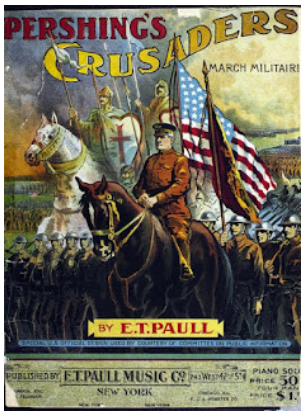
Pershing's Crusaders begins with a shot of a mounted crusader in armor (Niebuhr's work), holding a flag in one hand and a shield in the other. On either side of the crusader a doughboy in uniform marches. The narration next reads: "The mailed fist of the 'Rule by Might' (Niebuhr also played that part) lies heavily upon Europe. To it no contract is binding, no obligation is worthy of fulfillment, no word of honor sacred." A point of light appears on the center of the screen, moving outward, as though a drop of acid was spilled on the film, burning it from the center to its edges at a more or less equal rate. As the entire frame lightens, the viewer sees sand, nothing but sand, sand like that found in the Sahara or Mohave deserts. Suddenly, an arm emerges from the sand, wearing chain mail. In the throes of an unnamed agony, the arm stretches and contracts, before falling back, into the sand. Symbolically, the mailed fist, "Rule by Might," is defeated. It lies heavily upon the sandy wasteland, an apt visual metaphor for the defeat of Germany.

Viewed from a modern perspective, *Pershing's Crusaders* frequently appears dreary, but Niebuhr's work on the opening "punch shots" still stands out as a powerful piece of cinematography. After the war, Niebuhr set up the American Cinema Corporation and in the 1930s he tried his hand at documentary production. During the Second World War Niebuhr edited footage shot by the Signal Corps. He died suddenly in August 1946 as a result of a heart attack.

Film Music

The release of *Pershing's Crusaders* also had an interesting spin-off in the musical industry at the time. The E.T. Paull Music Company in New York City make a tie-in between the film and produced a *Pershing's Crusaders March* which was copyrighted in October 1918. Apparently, the music used for its first performances was other music than the music that was put together by Samuel E. Rothapfel during the first film exhibitions of this particular movie. So we do not think there is any reason to think that this is part of an original musical score which was written for this CPI film.

Here is a download link to the sheet music of *Pershing's Crusader's March*.



Cover picture from E.T. Paull's *Pershing's Crusaders March*

Footage from *Pershing's Crusaders* of good quality is hard to find on the internet, but we managed to locate the original opening scenes and uploaded the film with contemporary World War I music added to the film clip.

Enjoy!

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 2:04 PM No comments:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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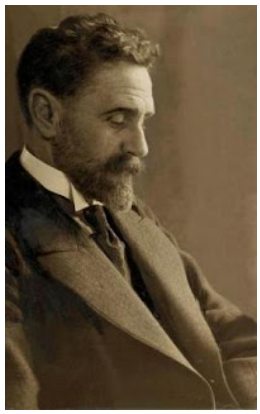
First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2015

How the Only Extant Footage of Roger Casement was Filmed (1915)



On August 3, 1916, Roger Casement was executed for treason at Pentonville prison in London. Born in 1864 near Dublin to an Anglo-Irish family, Casement went into the diplomatic service, received a knighthood for his humanitarian work and during World War I led an important role in the Irish struggle for independance. With German assistance he tried to organize an Irish Brigade to prepare an uprising against Britain. Shortly after he had entered Ireland on a German submarine he was captured and executed by the British. To some a martyr, to others a traitor - Roger Casement has remained a controversial and historical figure ever since.

Casement has only been captured on one short piece of footage that still exists today. The story how he was filmed is extraordinary and will feature in an upcoming article by authors Cooper C. Graham and Ron van Dopperen for the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television.*

We will keep you posted on this latest project!

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 1:44 PM 4 comments:

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2015

Pordenone Screens "On the Firing Line with the Germans" (USA, 1915)

On October 9, authors Jim Castellan and Ron van Dopperen attended the special screening at Pordenone of Wilbur H. Durborough's historical World War I film *On the Firing Line with the Germans*. Reconstructed by the Library of Congress and with a musical score on the piano by Philip Carli, the film was shown to a crowded Verdi theatre. Afterwards we had a panel discussion at the Hotel Moderno, which was also well attended and organized together with Marten van Harten, project coordinator of the International Network of Museums for Peace.

For a war film it is somewhat ironic that the scene that attracted most attention has nothing to do with the German army during World War I. Durborough's film has a short segment showing the first attempt by the *Women's International League of Peace and Freedom* (founded in 1915) to stop the Great War. Apart from the evolving public interest and historical value of this feature documentary - which was compared to the British classic World War I film *The Battle of the Somme* (1916) - the film was also applauded for the restoration work by the Library of Congress. To make this possible, in 2010 Cooper C. Graham and Jim Castellan began the process of reviewing and logging each reel of known Durborough film in the Library's

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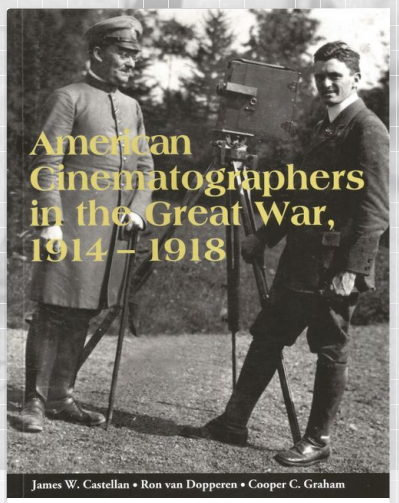

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Anatomy of an Authentic World War I Combat Scene (1915)

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▼ October (5)
How the Only Extant Footage of Roger Casement

nitrate vault and the National Archives film collection. Lost footage shot by Durborough not found on the surviving nitrate reels was found in the Signal Corps film collection of the National Archives. Research by Ron van Dopperen, Graham and Castellan led through an online film sourcing company to Signal Corps film with no identifiable source but identified as Durborough's by initial film frames associated with the titles on the Copyright paper print rolls in the Library of Congress.

Jim Castellan, Ron van Dopperen and Marten van Harten

Restoration Process

The Durborough film with its accompanying musical score is now in the public domain and available in digital (dcp) format. The nitrate reels were reviewed using the reconstruction script and select scenes and reels were optically printed using an Oxberry optical printer with a KL wetgate to create new internegatives. The new negatives were then scanned using a DFT Spirit Classic datacine in 1080p 24fps HD. The digital files were next loaded onto a Macintosh computer for review and assembled using Final Cut Pro X. The final step was to have the images masked, stabilized, and speed corrected using the Clipster by DVS. Apart from Mike Mashon, head of the Moving Picture Department at the Library of Congress, we would like to thank the full staff of this restoration project: Nitrate Inspection and Selection: Valerie Cervantes, Lynanne Schweighofer, George Willeman; Optical Printing: Brian Allan and Michael Hinton; Scanning: Pat Kennedy; Digital Assembly: George Willeman and Lynanne Schweighofer; Digital Masking and Stabilization: John Carter; Project Manager: Rob Stone.

Q&A at the Moderno Hotel after the film show

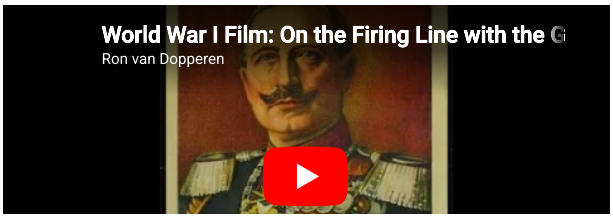
Interest by the International Peace Movement

Pointing out the interests of the international peace museums, Marten van Harten has outlined several ways how the original film can be presented in different countries. Screenings could be combined with short films on legal aspects such as women's rights. For permanent museum use there may be a demand for a number of selected scenes showing the casualties of war, the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw and the suffering of the civilian population on the eastern front, as filmed by Durborough. The film scene showing the 1915 peace initiative will also be used on October 16 for Global Ethics Day.

Last but not least, we would like to thank Kevin Brownlow for his support and interest in our film research - we were very pleased he attended our dinner after the film show - as well as David Robinson, director of the Pordenone Silent Film Festival for his work on getting the Durborough film on the program!

P.S: The international film journal *Sight & Sound* in December 2015 published this review of the exhibition of Durborough's film at Pordenone.

Posted before on YouTube, here is a short compilation of scenes from the movie, as shown on October 9.



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Back after 100 Years: "On the Firing Line with the...
Press Release: INMP Leads Campaign to Restore Hist...
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Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 5:46 PM No comments:

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2015

Back after 100 Years: "On the Firing Line with the Germans" (USA, 1915)

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 12:47 PM No comments:

MONDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2015

Press Release: INMP Leads Campaign to Restore Historic 1915 World War I Film

Pordenone, Italy – An international and interdisciplinary coalition, organized in the Netherlands under the guidance of the International Network of Museums for Peace (INMP), will enjoy the success of its campaign to restore Wilbur H. Durborough's 1915 World War I documentary film, *On the Firing Line with the Germans*, when it premieres this week at the 34th annual Pordenone Silent Film Festival.

Advertisement, *Moving Picture World*, February 26, 1916

Link to high res image

NGO's, museums, researchers and academics became interested in the film when it was discovered to contain rare footage of an international delegation of women (including future Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Jane Addams (the first U.S. woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize), and Dutch suffragist and peace activist Aletta Jacobs). In 1915, this delegation functioned as envoys on a citizen diplomacy mission to end World War I. The mission arose out of the historic 1915 International Women's Congress in The Hague, The Netherlands – organized by Jacobs and presided over by Addams -- in an effort to end the hostilities of World War I with a process of mediation. Over 1100 women attended this meeting, with the largest delegations coming from the Netherlands and the United States.

Scholars believe that this and other important historical stories can be powerfully told with the restoration of the Durborough Film. "Most people are completely unaware that internationally organized women – although lacking any formal political voice – were bold enough to meet with foreign ministers, chancellors, President Wilson and even The Pope, in an attempt to end World War 1. This film provides an opportunity to tell this

important story of diplomatic history and link it to the present. It is also an effective tool by which to educate the public about the development of international law", said Hope Elizabeth May, Professor of Philosophy at Central Michigan University, who enlisted the support of U.S. Ambassador for Global Criminal Justice, Stephen J. Rapp, in the campaign to restore the film. "Peace museums expressed strong interest in view of the ongoing cycle of world war commemorations", said historian Marten van Harten, INMP program coordinator and the initiator of the campaign. "Ambassador Rapp's letter of support made a strong impression on the Library of Congress and helped to shift the balance."

1915 Delegation for the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Also joining in the campaign was the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom (WILPF), which was formed as the result of the 1915 Hague meeting. WILPF, which is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, remains the oldest international women's peace organization in the world today. In addition to its importance for peace historians and activists, the film also has exceptional cinematographic, historic and educational value. Researcher James Castellan, who has been researching the film and working on its reconstruction since 2001, notes that it is the only existing, essentially complete World War I feature-length documentary film.

The restoration of this historic film, undertaken by the United States Library of Congress, will premiere on October 9, 2015 at 3:50pm in the Teatro Verdi at 15:50, with music by Philip Carli as accompanist. The film will be followed by a Questions and Answers panel at the Hotel Moderno. The panel will include Mr. Mike Mashon of the U.S. Library of Congress restoration team, James Castellan, film researcher / co-author of *American Cinematographers in the Great War* (London/John Libbey Publishing 2014), Prof. Hope Elizabeth May of Central Michigan University /The Bertha von Suttner Project, Prof. Giovanna Pagani, Honorary President of WILPF Italia, Mr. Marten van Harten of INMP /Historical Film for Peace Education Project, and Dutch film historian Ron van Dopperen (moderator and co-author of *American Cinematographers in the Great War*).

For more information on 100 years of efforts by women to stop war read the INMP Newsletter

Monday, October 5, 2015

Contact: Marten van Harten
International Network of Museums for Peace
Email: martenvanharten.ccs@gmail.com

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 10:59 AM 2 comments:

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2015

Pordenone Catalogue Features Restored World War I Film

On the Firing Line with the Germans, the 1915 World War I film shot by Wilbur H. Durborough, features in this years edition of the catalogue of the Pordenone Silent Film Festival. As announced before, after almost one hundred years the movie will have its second premiere on Friday October 9, 2015, as part of the World War I Centennial program by the Pordenone Festival and accompanied by a special musical arrangement. It has been restored and digitized by the staff of the Library of Congress.

Durborough (left) with American reporters on the Eastern Front. Frame from his war film
Link to high res image

The Pordenone Film Catalogue describes the importance of this World War I movie for early film history and also has some comments by Marten van Harten, on behalf of the International Network of Museums for Peace, on the special significance of this film for the 20th century peace movement. The restoration of the Durborough film has been enthusiastically supported by this international organization.
The catalogue description of the Durborough World War I film can be viewed and downloaded here.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 2:52 PM No comments:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2015

Lost & Found: "The German Curse in Russia" (USA, 1918)

Among the World War I films considered "lost" there is one movie we would particularly like to find and see again: Donald C. Thompson's *The German Curse in Russia*. Distributed by Pathé in January 1918, the film documents Thompson's extraordinary adventures during the Russian Revolution. Although no footage has been found so far, Thompson has left us with a remarkable collection of still photographs.

Russian volunteers for the front, photographed by Donald C. Thompson

Filming the Russian Revolution

As described in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*, Thompson reached Petrograd in February 1917 on an assignment for *Leslie's Weekly*. Just one month later the Petrograd regiments rebelled and the Tsar was replaced by a Provisional Government under the leadership of Kerensky. Meanwhile, the Bolsheviks agitated for peace, bread and land. Thompson's camera not only captured the leading politicians, including Lenin and Trotsky. He also filmed the demonstrations in the streets of Petrograd and in July 1917 he went to the front to cover the summer offensive against the German army. With chaos increasing in the country he left Russia in September 1917, shortly before the Communist regime took over.

Thompson (left) with Russian soldiers at the Dvinsk frontline

Thompson's film *The German Curse in Russia* is of great historical value. Contemporary footage of the Russian Revolution is extremely rare and Thompson was by all accounts the only American cinematographer to witness these events. The opening title of his movie gives a distinct impression of its message: "Since March 1917, the

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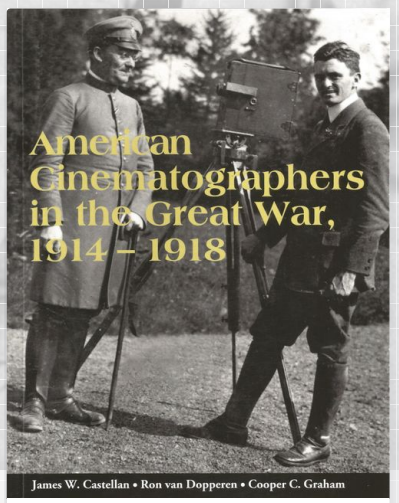

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Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television

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POPULAR POSTS

Captured on Film by U.S. Cameramen - The Romanov Murder Scene (1918)

World War I Combat Camera Edwin F. Weigle Found!

Anatomy of an Authentic World War I Combat Scene (1915)

BLOG ARCHIVE

► 2018 (50)
► 2017 (56)
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▼ 2015 (37)
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world believes that Russia forsook her allies, but records from my diary and camera will show that Russia's anarchy was not willed by her people, but was caused by vile German intrigue working in the unthinking masses." How this message was conveyed into pictures has been described in our latest book

Advertisement for Thompson's film *The German Curse in Russia*, copied from the *Oakland Tribune*, 11 May 1918

Despite the loss of his films many of Thompson's still pictures taken during the Russian Revolution have been preserved. A selection of 201 photographs was published in his book *The Crime of the Twentieth Century* in 1918. For those of you who would like to see more here is a link to a weblog on Thompson's remarkable picture book.

UPDATE!

In February 2017, the authors found footage from Thompson's film *The German Curse in Russia*.

Check out this link for an update!

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:03 AM No comments:

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2015

Durborough War Film Premiere Set For October 9

Wilbur H. Durborough's historical film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (1915) has been scanned, digitized and restored by the Library of Congress. Nearly one hundred years after it was first shown the movie will be thrown on the screen again in all its former splendor. This will be on Friday October 9, at the Pordenone Silent Film Festival in Italy. After the exhibition authors Jim Castellan and Ron van Dopperen will answer any questions on the making of this remarkable World War I feature film which has been described in their latest book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*. Unfortunately, co-author Cooper Graham can't join us.

American reporters at the Adlon Hotel, a lost scene now restored in Durborough's World War I film. Colorized photograph.
Link to high res image

As a teaser, here is a short clip from Durborough's war film showing scenes that were considered lost. The authors found these segments in the U.S. Signal Corps collection at the National Archives in Washington, DC. As a result, the film is almost complete now and will be shown as originally edited in 1915 when first released in America. You will have an intimate view of the German Imperial family, see a group of American war reporters - including camera correspondent Durborough - at the Adlon Hotel in Berlin, and witness Durborough interviewing the Prussian general and military writer, Friedrich von Bernhardi. For more information on this special exhibition go to the website of the Pordenone Film Festival.

The authors would like to thank the staff of the Library of Congress for a great job well done!

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:01 PM No comments:

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2015

Lost & Found: "The German Curse in Russia" (USA, 1...
Durborough War Film Premiere Set For October 9
Adrian C. Duff, the Camera Kid
Air Raid Over Venice! (1915)

► August (7)
► July (2)
► June (6)
► May (2)
► April (1)
► March (1)
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► 2014 (11)
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Adrian C. Duff, the Camera Kid

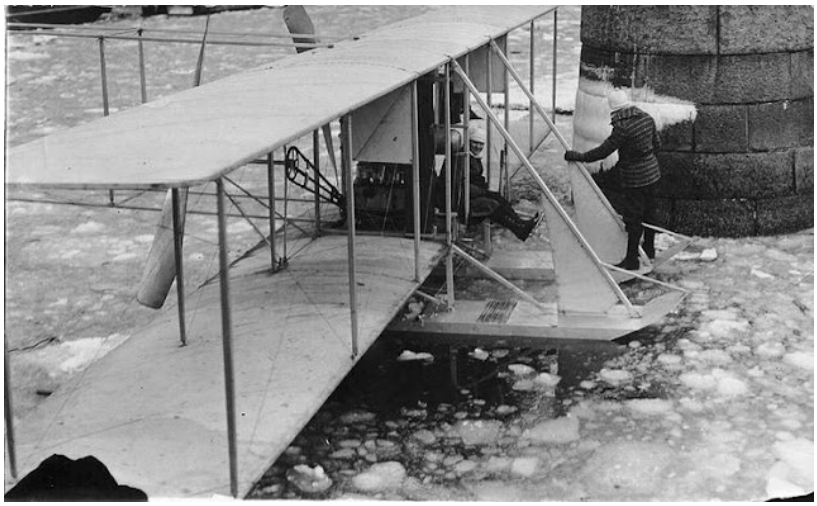
Because he was primarily a still photographer we only mentioned him briefly in our book on the American film cameramen of World War I. Also, as a result of his untimely death, Adrian C. Duff's name and reputation soon vanished into oblivion after the Great War had ended. This weblog is another attempt to set the record straight and give a long forgotten American war photographer the credits he deserves.

Adrian C. Duff (1918), when he was a Sergeant in the U.S. Signal Corps. Colorized picture.

Link to original high res image

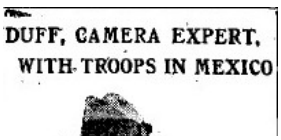
Shooting the First Aerial Pictures Above New York City

Born in New York City in 1893, Duff made national headlines in February 1912 when he got in a plane with aviator Frank T. Coffyn and for the first time in history photographed New York City from above. Because of his youth - he was only 21 at the time - he was nicknamed "The Camera Kid". These remarkable pictures were taken above Manhattan with a small hand camera and Duff had considerable difficulty in steadying it because of the turbulence. Duff was on the staff of the American Press Association when he made these photographs. In a special press release Duff explained how he managed to make these historical pictures.



Photographer Duff and aviator Coffyn, ready for take off, February 1912
Link to low res image

The American Press Association sent Duff to Vera Cruz, Mexico, in April 1914 and he covered the landing of the U.S. Marines. Shortly afterwards, when war broke out in Europe, he crossed the Atlantic and made his way into Belgium. He was in Antwerp when the Germans bombed the city with their Zeppelins, witnessed the destruction of Termonde and covered the siege of Antwerp in October 1914 with his camera. Because of his experience as a war photographer his employer sent him into Mexico again to cover General Pershing's 1916 expedition against Pancho Villa.


DUFF, CAMERA EXPERT,
WITH TROOPS IN MEXICO

When America entered the First World War, Duff was assigned to the 26th U.S. Division and sent to Europe. He was commissioned as a Sergeant and later promoted to Lieutenant in the Photo Unit that accompanied the 35th Division. A number of pictures in the Signal Corps collection of the National Archives in Washington, D.C, are credited to Duff.

Here is a special selection, all taken in the final months of the war when Duff was stationed at the Western Front.

Wounded soldier, receiving first aid. September 26, 1918

Elderly French couple, greeting American soldiers. November 6, 1918

Medical corps, carrying wounded soldier. July 22, 1918

Fearless Photographer

Duff was, by all accounts, a fearless photographer and always ready to get into the thick of the fight to make a good picture. Together with one of the Signal Corps operators, he crawled out into No Man's Land just before an attack was scheduled to take place, and, though exposed to both German and American fire, set up his camera in order that the people at home, seated comfortably in motion-picture theatres, might actually see the boys going "over the top." On another occasion during the Battle of Chateau-Thiery, Duff became separated from the troops to which he was attached and found himself under the fire of a German machine- gun, but in spite of the hail of bullets he stuck to his work, made his pictures, and returned to the American lines herding in front of him a group of Germans whom he had captured at the point of an empty revolver. He twice received a citation for bravery as result of this.

This photograph in the Signal Corps collection was taken shortly after this event. You will find more information on Duff's part in the caption of the high res image.

Sergeant Adrian C. Duff, U. S. Signal Corps, colorized picture taken in France on July 30, 1918

Link to original high res image page 1
Link to original high res image page 2

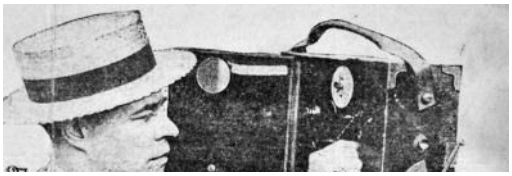
Adrian C. Duff died unexpectedly on March 7, 1920, at the age of 28 in a car crash in Brooklyn, New York City. At the time of his sudden death he was working as a motion picture cameraman for Gaumont. Apart from his war pictures there is probably also film shot by Duff during World War I, but no research has been done on this so far.

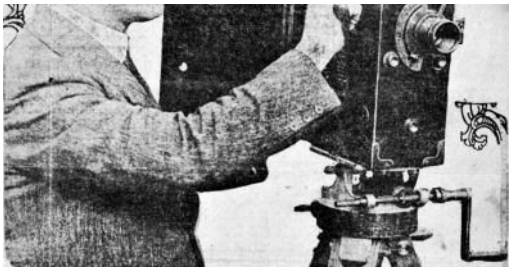
Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 5:00 PM 4 comments:

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2015

Air Raid Over Venice! (1915)

Sent to Europe to cover the Great War by William Randolph Hearst, Ansel E. Wallace filmed the German offensive on the eastern front, was captured by a German submarine when he tried to cross the English Channel and finally made his way to Italy to report on the Italian entry into the war. One of the first newsreel cameramen in American film history, Wallace had a major scoop in 1915 with his pictures of the new super submarines that were deployed by the German Navy.





A.E. Wallace, copied from the *Boston American*, 29 August 1915
Link to high res image

Bound for Venice

Wallace's experiences during World War I feature in a special chapter on the Hearst cameramen in our latest book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*. Among the footage shot by Wallace in wartime Italy are some remarkable scenes of the Italian declaration of war, taken in Rome. He also filmed Italian troops that were ordered to protect the Austrian Embassy from the crowds. Heading for the war zone, Wallace left Rome bound for Venice on May 26, 1915. The people in the city, Wallace said, were "spy mad", and he had a hard time taking his pictures because of the strict censorhip by the Italian authorities. But he was in Venice in time to report on one of the first Austrian air raids on the city in the summer of 1915.

Here is his personal account on this historical event, as printed in the *Washington Herald* of July 11, 1915:

WASHINGTON, D. C., SUNDAY, JULY 11, 1915

Americans Caught in Rain Of Bombs in Venice Air Raid

Terror in Italian City, Following Visitation by Austrian Aviators, Described by "Movie" Photographer—Air Darts Near Travelers from United States.

By A. E. WALLACE,
War motion-picture photographer, just returned from eight months' tour of the various fronts.

New York, July 10.—Great sirens shrieked their warnings from all parts of the city. Immediately illuminated bombs shot upward from the Campenello, burst in the sky and spread their rays in all directions, except downwards. Below, where all was darkness, hundreds of machine guns barked in an incessant roar.

Our gondolier made all haste along the Grand Canal to reach the Grand Hotel, while his passengers, including myself, tore out the seats and held them over our heads. During a lull in the firing we plainly heard the hum of an aeroplane motor somewhere above. Then pandemonium broke forth again. Such is a midnight air raid on Venice.

Palace Cased in Steel.

Venice the beautiful, the historic has been converted into a fortress. All lights are ordered out at dusk. Troops are stationed on roofs to watch for lights with oders to fire as soon as even the slightest twinkle is observed. The magnificent St. Mark's Cathedral in St. Mark's square has been encased in steel girders and banked with sand bags to protect it from the bombs of aviators.

The Doge's Palace has been treated likewise. The Campenello, towering far above its surroundings, has a huge bomb-throwing machine on its top—not explosive bombs, but light bombs, which illuminate the skies and make easier the work of the men behind the anti-aircraft guns.

Arrested as Spy.

On my arrival at Venice from Rome it was my hope that I would be permitted the free use of my motion picture camera and "still" cameras. I found the situa-

American companion excitedly, and he commenced to tear up the seats. This I learned was done so they might be held over the head as a protection against steel arrows dropped by the enemy's aviators.

Only a few minutes after this we hear the whirr of an aeroplane. The Austrian must have been flying dangerously low, for us to have heard his motor in view of the fact that the sirens were still making the night hideous and machine guns had begun to rattle in various parts of the city. We could not see him, however. The sound died out in a few seconds. We judged that he was flying toward the arsenal, for soon we heard guns firing there.

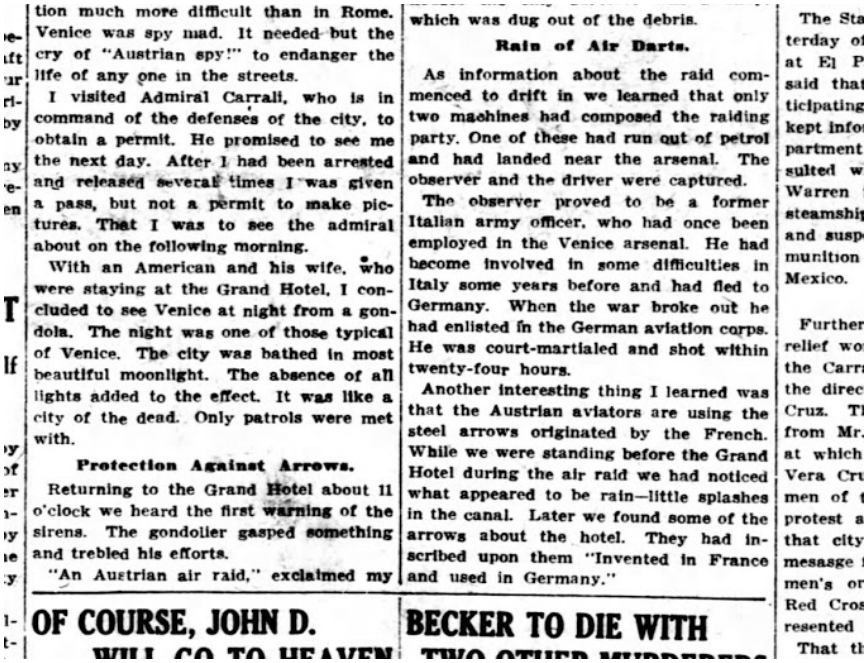
Bomb's "Tidal Wave."

Several heavy explosions from the direction of the arsenal made us lieve it had been hit. We learned, later that the Austrian had dropped a particularly heavy charge near it.

We finally reached the hotel. Most of the guests were standing trembling in the halls and dining-room. Some of us stood on the steps in the hope of catching sight of an aeroplane. We didn't see any, but we soon heard one. Several bombs were dropped in the Grand Canal, near the custom house, only about 100 yards from where we stood.

A great volume of water rose in the air to a dull roar and the next instant a small tidal wave from the canal had swept upon us, drenching us to the knee. We fled without ceremony.

On the following morning we learned that part of the arsenal had been destroyed, a torpedo boat blown up, and several of her crew killed and four or five houses occupied by workmen employed in the arsenal destroyed with several score of deaths. In one of the houses the only survivor was a baby,



tion much more difficult than in Rome. Venice was spy mad. It needed but the cry of "Austrian spy!" to endanger the life of any one in the streets.

I visited Admiral Carrali, who is in command of the defenses of the city, to obtain a permit. He promised to see me the next day. After I had been arrested and released several times I was given a pass, but not a permit to make pictures. That I was to see the admiral about on the following morning.

With an American and his wife, who were staying at the Grand Hotel, I concluded to see Venice at night from a gondola. The night was one of those typical of Venice. The city was bathed in most beautiful moonlight. The absence of all lights added to the effect. It was like a city of the dead. Only patrols were met with.

Protection Against Arrows.

Returning to the Grand Hotel about 11 o'clock we heard the first warning of the sirens. The gondolier gasped something and trebled his efforts.

"An Austrian air raid," exclaimed my

which was dug out of the debris.

Rain of Air Darts.

As information about the raid commenced to drift in we learned that only two machines had composed the raiding party. One of these had run out of petrol and had landed near the arsenal. The observer and the driver were captured.

The observer proved to be a former Italian army officer, who had once been employed in the Venice arsenal. He had become involved in some difficulties in Italy some years before and had fled to Germany. When the war broke out he had enlisted in the German aviation corps. He was court-martialed and shot within twenty-four hours.

Another interesting thing I learned was that the Austrian aviators are using the steel arrows originated by the French. While we were standing before the Grand Hotel during the air raid we had noticed what appeared to be rain—little splashes in the canal. Later we found some of the arrows about the hotel. They had inscribed upon them "Invented in France and used in Germany."

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OF COURSE, JOHN D.

BECKER TO DIE WITH

A.E. Wallace returned to his hometown Evansville, Indiana, and started his own photographic business. He died in Evansville on December 20, 1941 and was buried at Oak Hill Cemetery.

Download: Death certificate Ansel E. Wallace (1941)

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 4:00 PM No comments:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom

Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

MONDAY, AUGUST 31, 2015

"On the Firing Line with the Germans" (1915) Now Ready For Pordenone

Durborough meets a German General. Colorized reproduction from film frame *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (USA, 1915)

Link to original high res image

Word has reached us that the Library of Congress has finished the restored feature documentary World War I film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (1915) by Wilbur H. Durborough, the American camera correspondent who accompanied the German offensive on the eastern front in the summer of 1915.

Restored Digital Copy

Out of the original footage found at the Library of Congress and the National Archives, with additional input and film found by the authors during our research for our latest book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*, the staff of the Library of Congress has edited a restored digital copy running 1:48 minutes. The new film will be shipped to Pordenone, Italy, for a premiere exhibition during its Silent Film Festival in October 2015, one hundred years after the film was first shown in the United States.

More on the upcoming exhibition in this weblog!

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 1:00 PM No comments:

TUESDAY, AUGUST 25, 2015

Advertising the Great War on Screen

When the First World War broke out in 1914 American media responded with great interest. There was a substantial public demand for news about the war and newspapers were eager for stories. Film also was soon being used to promote the war coverage by American newspapers. As described in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War* , it didn't take long before newspaper editors discovered the advantages of covering the Great War both in print and motion pictures. The way the *Chicago Tribune* handled this offers a prime example.

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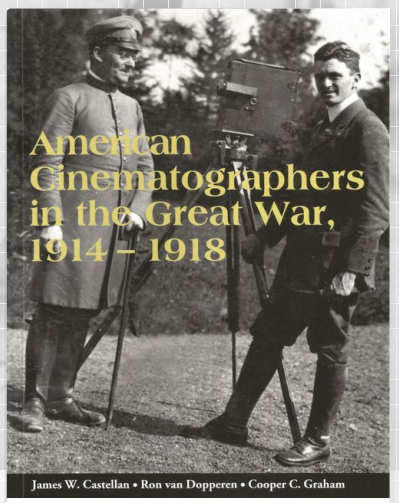

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Captured on Film by U.S. Cameramen - The Romanov Murder Scene (1918)

World War I Combat Camera Edwin F. Weigle Found!

Anatomy of an Authentic World War I Combat Scene (1915)

BLOG ARCHIVE

► 2018 (50)
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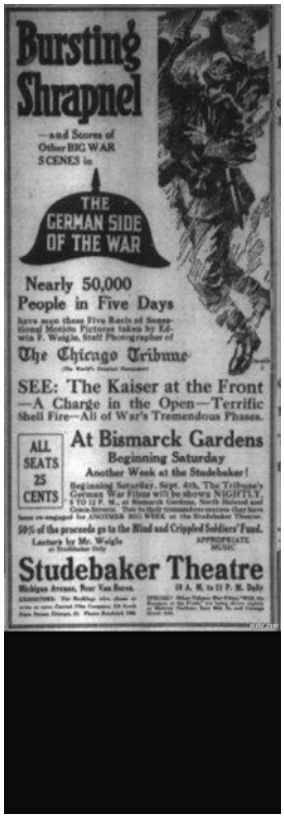
Advertisement for the Chicago Tribune's *The German Side of the War*, 29 August 1915

Cross-Media Approach

By using a cross-media approach, the *Chicago Tribune* took out a massive advertising campaign in 1914-1916 to promote its own war documentary films. The blazing publicity not only expanded the *Tribune*'s money. Circulation of the newspaper was also stimulated this way. Art work was especially important in these advertisements. As cameramen soon found out when they filmed the First World War, from a photographic point of view the military conflict was very hard to cover. Lighting conditions were terrible at the western front. Also, as most of the activities took place in the trenches, there usually wasn't a trace of the enemy and No Man's Land seemed like a wasteland. As a result, most of the footage was taken behind the firing line and contained repetitive scenes of infantry marching and drilling, military inspections, artillery practice, etc. Gone were the days of the drummer boy, the bugle call and the charge of the Light Brigade. This was modern warfare. It was muddy. It was messy. It was something completely different.

To compensate for the lack of exciting documentary footage the publicity department of the *Chicago Tribune* relied heavily on professionally drawn illustrations of infantry charges, close-ups of soldiers going over the top and the like. The most interesting advertisements have been selected in these slide shows. Enjoy!



▼ August (7)

"On the Firing Line with the Germans" (1915) Now R...

Advertising the Great War on Screen

First Moving Pictures Jacobs and Addams Discovered

War in the Clouds Filmed by Edwin Weigle (1915)

With Captain Kleinschmidt in "War on Three Fronts"...

Armed with Cameras: Major James Barnes and the U.S...

The Chicago Tribune's "With the Russians at the Fr...

► July (2)

► June (6)

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STUDEBAKER THEATRE 25c

See
This House Blown Up
As If It Were Paper

You'll see, in these FIRST authentic motion pictures of the European War, the Belgian Infantry fighting in very

This sensational spectacle is typical of the scenes in the entire 4 reels of these thrilling motion pictures. They bring the European

The FIRST and ONLY Authentic
MOTION PICTURES
OF THE
EUROPEAN WAR

The Chicago Tribune

The Chicago Tribune secured the exclusive privilege to make motion pictures on the Belgian

See these startling motion pictures TODAY at the STUDEBAKER THEATRE. Edwin F. Wright, staff photographer of the Chicago Tribune, was engaged to go

STUDEBAKER THEATRE
Michigan Blvd. near Van Buren St.
11 a. m. to 11 p. m. Daily. All Seats 25c
THIS WEEK ONLY
International Motion Picture Co.

EXHIBITORS:

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 4:00 PM No comments:

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2015

First Moving Pictures Jacobs and Addams Discovered

World War I cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough recently made national headlines in Holland, when it was discovered that in his film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (1915) there is a short historical scene showing suffragette leaders Aletta Jacobs and Jane Addams. This discovery made it to prime time news on Dutch TV and radio. Here's a link to this scene.

Durborough meets suffragette leaders Addams, Hamilton and Jacobs. Frame from his 1915 war film. Colorized image.

Link to original high res image

Historic Scene taken in Berlin

The film fragment, which was also described in our latest book shows the peace movement leaders Aletta Jacobs from Holland and Jane Addams (US) in front of the Brandenburger Tor in Berlin on May 21, 1915, on their way to visit the German Secretary of State and the Reichskanzler with a peace mediation proposal. In this scene Durborough can be seen talking with these ladies. The movie has the only known extant film of Jacobs who was a leading suffragette in the Netherlands. The film also shows Jane Addams who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931. The discovery of this historical footage as well as the support of the International Network of Museums for Peace (INMP) has contributed to the reconstruction of Durborough's film by the Library of Congress. The reconstructed Durborough World War I film is set for screening at the upcoming Pordenone Film Festival in October 2015. The Dutch Film Museum EYE has also expressed its interest in showing the Durborough film in Holland.

We will keep you posted on this special screening at Pordenone!

Update

In November 2016, the Library of Congress released the restored Durborough film online.

Read more »

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 4:00 PM No comments:

MONDAY, AUGUST 17, 2015

War in the Clouds Filmed by Edwin Weigle (1915)

When Italy entered World War I in 1915 the Alps became a scene of heavy fighting. On the spot was Edwin F. Weigle, cameraman for the *Chicago Tribune* and one of the first cinematographers to film this new type of mountain warfare. The films that he brought back to the United States were edited into his succesful movie *The German Side of the War*, described in our latest book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*

Weigle filming warfare in the Alps. Colorized official photograph in the collection of the Austrian State Archives
Link to original high res image

A remarkable picture of Weigle filming the First World War recently was discovered by the authors in the online archives of the Austrian State Archives. The picture was taken in June 1915 when Weigle was present in the opening rounds of the war between the Austrian and Italian army. Weigle traveled to the Trentino where he shot most of his scenes, and he also visited the area around Lake Garda. He had a close call when standing in a trench with four Austrian officers an Italian shell bursted nearby. Weigle's film demonstrated how the beautiful Alpine mountain landscape was rearranged and devastated by modern warfare. The scenes made quite an impression when his film was exhibited in the United States in August 1915. Here are some lines with Weigle's personal comments, taken from the theater program of his film *The German Side of the War*:

After the entering of the Teutons into Lemberg, I left and went to the Italian frontier, stopping first at Trentino an important city of the Austrian border of the Tyrolean Alps. German troops were marching through the mountains to the Italian front. Never in my life have I seen such beautiful scenery as that through which the soldiers passed. I stood by when Captain Steiner, an aviator, undertook to sail his areoplane over the Alps and drop bombs upon the Italians. He left amid cheers. He never returned. At Trentino, His Excellency Field Marshal Von Horak, was in charge of the Austro-German Army of 50,000 soldiers. It was the duty of these men to stop the invading Italians. It is impossible for one to realize the difficulties at which these soldiers are confronted for the rugged heights of the Tyrolean Alps are well nigh impregnable.

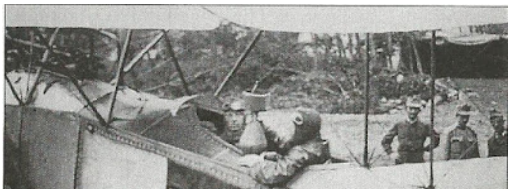
For several days I stayed in and near Trentino. Then the horrors of war had become indelibly inscribed in my memory. I left for Copenhagen, Denmark, from where I sailed to America inexpressibly glad to return to 'The Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave'.

Edwin Weigle leaving Chicago. Scene from *The German Side of the War* (1915)

Embedded by the Austrian Military Press Office

The scene showing Captain Steiner taking off with his plane was found at the Library of Congress. Additional research for our latest book has shown that Weigle was accompanied by Captain Gschliesser - perhaps one of the officers in the picture above - of the Austrian military press office. They were at Lavarone, Folgara and the Ortler area. Gschliesser also censored Weigle's footage. When Weigle left Vienna, the Austrians supplied him with additional war scenes from their film archives. Despite all courtesies Weigle clearly was an "embedded" film correspondent.

Austrian anti-aircraft artillery, photographed by Weigle



Captain Steiner taking off for his ill-fated flight above the Alps

Finally, here is Weigle's own personal story on his experiences in the Alps with the Austrians, copied from the *Chicago Tribune* of August 5, 1915:

"The Austrians are remodeling the Alps and converting them into great natural fortresses honeycombed with tunnels and trenches driven through solid rock with dynamite and pneumatic drills," said Mr. Weigle. "From the warm valleys covered with grape vines to the snow capped peaks 10,000 feet above men toil all day and all night tugging great batteries up the winding roads and paths.

Send River Messages in Bottles.

"Trent itself is empty. The Italians who lived there have been driven out or taken to concentration camps. There are thousands of men of Italian lineage, however, in the Austrian army, and they are just as bitter against the army from the peninsula as the Austrians themselves. Germans and Austrians overrun the cities and there are thousands of German manned batteries of 15 centimeter guns.

"And there are hundreds of Italian spies in the vicinity of Trent and Riva. They place their code messages in bottles and send them floating down the river to Lake Gardo. A special detail of several hundred men is strung along the river shores to do nothing but watch for the bottles. The current is swift, and where they can not drag the secret messages to shore with long handled nets they shoot at the bottles and break them.

"From Trent to Riva, about fifteen miles to the southwest, the road winds along the mountain side like a smooth white ribbon. Near Trent it is about 900 feet above the valley, but where it crosses the Italian border one mile south of Riva it runs over a bridge 3,000 feet above the water below. This bridge has been left standing, but it had been mined by the Austrians.

"Near Riva a huge rock rises 2,000 feet. Batteries are planted on all sides of it and it commands Lake Gardo, the "scarlet sea," as well as the mountain passes to the southeast. Another mountain in the sides of which the Austrians have drilled hundreds of tunnels, trenches, and howitzer ledges, is Folgario, near Rovereto, southeast of Trienle. It was while I was standing in a trench on Folgario with four Austrian officers that an Italian shell burst nearby and we were all stunned by the concussion."

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:32 AM No comments:

MONDAY, AUGUST 10, 2015

With Captain Kleinschmidt in "War on Three Fronts" (USA, 1916)

Big game hunter, Arctic explorer, writer, lecturer and cinematographer Captain Frank E. Kleinschmidt (1871-1949) deserves a special place in World War I film history. He was in 1915 the only neutral American cameraman to film a submarine in action and fly above the Balkan front, taking motion pictures of the attack by the Central Powers on the Serbian capital, Belgrade. Kleinschmidt's camera also recorded some stunning scenes of actual fighting in the

trenches on the eastern front, which were retrieved and described in our latest book, *American Cinematographers in the Great War*

Publicity scenes from Kleinschmidt's film *War on Three Fronts*

Tantalizing New Information

Since we published this book, some tantalizing new pieces of information on Frank Kleinschmidt's World War I movie adventures have been found. On June 2, 2014, the Austrian government opened the exhibition *Extra Ausgabee!* on the *k.u.k. Kriegspressequartier*, the Austro-Hungarian military press office during World War I. Kleinschmidt was attached to this press office as an accredited war reporter between February-December 1915. Among the many interesting photographs presented at this exhibition in Vienna was a picture showing Kleinschmidt cranking a movie camera in the company of a squad of Austro-Hungarian soldiers. The caption - translated into English - says: "The American film operator Captain Frank E. Kleinschmidt, with the 32. Lft. Infantry Regiment in the trenches."

Das 32. Lft. Inf. Reg. im Schutzengraben, der U.S.-Filmoperateur Captain Frank E. Kleinschmidt. Colorized picture from www.twitter.com/extraausgabee

Scenes showing Kleinschmidt at work while filming the Great War are rare, and while extremely fascinating this picture does present some problems. The photograph was taken from the backside of the trench, presumably at a great risk for the cameraman because he must have exposed himself as a target for the enemy. Judging from the easy-going behaviour of the soldiers, the scene probably was shot somewhere behind the actual firing lines for the purpose of getting a good picture. The caption is puzzling. The 32th K.u.K. Infantry Regiment was an Hungarian unit, based at Trieste near the Adriatic Sea. This fits in with Kleinschmidt's work at the military press office. From November 6, 1915, he was attached to the staff of the 16th Army Corps at Trieste. Apart from filming Austrian mine sweeping activities, Kleinschmidt covered an air raid on the Italian coast from the Trieste frontline. However, the Austrians had no such military unit as a "Lft. Inf. Reg.". "Lft." was short for *Luftfahrtruppe*, the Austrian World War I airforce. Perhaps this specific picture was taken with the assistance of a detachment of airforce soldiers based near Trieste.

Frank E. Kleinschmidt in Austrian airforce uniform. Studio portrait early 1915. Courtesy Ruth Sarrett.
Link to high res image

Incorporated into Hollywood Legend

The collection of the Austrian World War I exhibition also revealed a remarkable picture taken by Kleinschmidt in Galicia, during the 1915 Austro-German offensive on the eastern front in Russian Poland. This picture was reproduced in our latest book as a publicity shot for his film *War on Three Fronts*. The presentation at Vienna showed that Kleinschmidt's photograph was also published in the Austrian press, presumably because he was part of an official Austro-Hungarian photographic unit. The picture appeared on July 15, 1915 in the *Weltspiegel* and shows Austrian gunners manning a 15-centimeter battery of artillery. This scene later became part of Hollywood legend and history, because it was bought by director D.W. Griffith when he was working on his World War I drama *Hearts of the World* (1918) with actresses Lilian and Dorothy Gish and his cameraman Billy Bitzer. In Griffith's version the Austrians were introduced as brutal German soldiers threatening a peaceful French village. Clearly, several liberties were taken by Griffith with historical events. Kleinschmidt, as we found out during our research, was very much disappointed Griffith hadn't used more of his war film. He also offered his services to Griffith as an actor and military advisor for any possible upcoming new war films.

Austrian artillery in action on the Eastern Font. Colorized publicity picture from Kleinschmidt's film.

The Austrian exhibition on the military press office during World War I closed on October 31, 2014, but on Twitter many fascinating pictures can still be viewed at www.twitter.com/extraausgabee

The exhibition is particularly interesting because of the attention it gives to the way the Austro-Hungarian government used modern pictorial media such as films for wartime propaganda purposes. In this respect the Dual Monarchy was - compared to the Germans as well as the Entente - clearly open to a more modern approach.

A publication on the Austrian World War I exhibition can be seen and downloaded here.

AUSSTELLUNG

„Extraausgabee –!"

Die Medien und der Krieg

1914 – 1918

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 5:27 PM No comments:

THURSDAY, AUGUST 6, 2015

Armed with Cameras: Major James Barnes and the U.S. Signal Corps

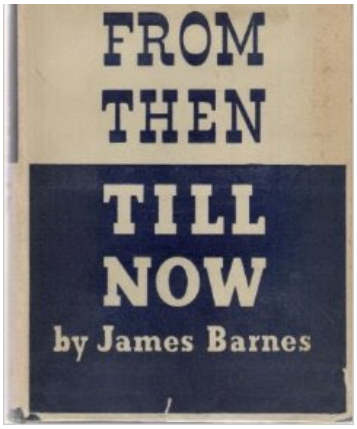
Surprisingly little-remembered now, author/war correspondent/explorer and lecturer James Barnes played an important role when the U.S. Signal Corps was assigned to make official films and pictures of the American entry into World War I. A rare combination of Ernest Hemingway, Lowell Thomas and Richard Halliburton, Barnes not only was a prolific writer who produced 28 books and hundreds of short stories, he also headed the U.S. Signal Corps Photographic Division. As described in our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War,* among the men Barnes first recruited as photographic officers were Edwin F. Weigle and Albert K. Dawson, cameramen who had gained first-hand experience as war reporters in Europe.

The original team of the U.S. Signal Corps Photographic Division: from left to right Captain Charles Betz, Lt. Edward Steichen, Lt. Edwin F. Weigle, Major James Barnes and Lt. Albert K. Dawson. Colorized photograph. Source: National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Link to high res image

Born in Annapolis, Maryland, in 1866, Barnes graduated from Princeton University and launced a succesful career in journalism. He served as a lieutenant in the First Battalion of the New York State Naval Militia during the Spanish-American War. Following six years as a war correspondent in South Africa and Venezuela, he became a literary editor specializing in books about American naval history. Commissioned Major in the Air Service of the Signal Corps in July 1917, Barnes was ordered to set up a new Photographic Division. Barnes had been head of the Princeton Flying School and he was a notable war correspondent, but his personal experience in photography was - as he admitted himself - extremely limited. The main reason why he was given the job seems to have been his coverage of an expedition across Africa in 1913-1914, together with Cherry Kearton, the famous British naturalist photographer and cinematographer.

Hard Time

As Barnes mentioned in his autobiography *From Then Till Now* (1934), the Photographic Division in these early days had a hard time setting up operations. The Division was seriously understaffed, but by September 1917 and with the assistance of the British two detachments of photographers had been sent to the European front and a program for camera production was laid out both for still photography and motion picture coverage. In 1918, Barnes was given charge of the U.S. School of Aerial Photography at Kodak Park in Rochester, New York. Under his supervision 25 officers were commissioned and about 300 American cameramen were sent overseas to the war zone. His contribution to the American films of World War I was in a word significant.



From 1918 until his death in 1936, James Barnes served as President of the Naval History Society. His life and work during World War I definitely merits further research.

Barnes' personal story on the U.S. Signal Corps Photographic Division can be read here at these pages from his autobiography.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:53 AM No comments:

SATURDAY, AUGUST 1, 2015

The Chicago Tribune's "With the Russians at the Front" (1915)

On June 25, the First Division Museum in Wheaton, Illinois, presented about two reels of the *Chicago Tribune*'s World War I film *With the Russians at the Front,* which was originally released in America in August 1915. The remaining footage runs for about 23 minutes and although some scenes are out of place the film presentation is very interesting. Here is the video on YouTube.

Donald C. Thompson

The footage of this American World War I film comes from the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. The movie was shot by Donald C. Thompson who accompanied Robert McCormick, editor and owner of the *Chicago Tribune,* during his trip to Russia and the eastern front. The presentation was introduced by film historian David

Mould who has done previous research on Thompson. In his lecture Mould mentions McCormick's "tortured relationship" with Thompson, described by Mould as a "drunk" and a "rogue". After his arrival back in the United States McCormick sued Thompson because he never handed back his motion picture equipment to the *Chicago Tribune*.

Here is a picture of Thompson, taken shortly before his departure to Russia:

Donald Thompson with Graflex camera, 1915. Colorized picture.
Link to original high res image

The video presentation on YouTube is interesting for several reasons. To accompany the original film McCormick's film lecture notes are used. David Mould also gives some useful background information on the way the *Chicago Tribune* got into the film business and how some scenes were reconstructed for the camera by Thompson. The film has also been described in our latest book on the American cinematographers of World War I.

David Mould mentioned in his speech that Weigle's film *The German Side of the War* (1915) has been lost. As described in our previous publications, the Library of Congress has several hundred feet of this *Chicago Tribune* film, and we also found additional footage in the Allen Collection. In addition, the authors have located footage of Thompson's movie *With the Russians at the Front* at the Library of Congress. So, perhaps we will be able to show these two World War I films again after one hundred years.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 5:00 PM No comments:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

THURSDAY, JULY 30, 2015

George Ercole, "Pathé News" War Photographer

Half Irish, half French, George Ercole ranks among the most prominent newsreel men in early film history. Because he wasn't American we considered him "off limits" and didn't mention him in our latest book on the American cinematographers of World War I. This weblog is to set the record straight and give Ercole the credits he deserves.

George Ercole, circa 1923

At the outbreak of war in 1914, Ercole was working in France as a cameraman for Pathé. The film company sent him to Belgium. He was at Mons (Bergen) in August 1914 when the British Expeditionary Force made their famous stand against the invading German army. During this engagement a British major approached Ercole and told him that if he didn't make himself scarce he would be shot. None of his Belgian films saw the light. In 1915, Pathé sent Ercole as a special correspondent to Russia. He was assigned to the Skobelev Committee that set up a film propaganda division for the Russian government, and was provided on the railways with a special coach and military passes.

Filming the Siege of Przemyśl

Ercole's first assigment took him to area around Przemyśl in Poland, a fortified city that was under siege by the Russian army. After a harsh winter campaign the Austrian garrison inside Przemyśl surrendered to the Russians on March 22, 1915. Ercole's films of the siege of Przemyśl - long considered lost - were recently discovered in the Russian archives and have been uploaded on our YouTube channel.

In the CBS collection of the National Archives in Washington, D.C. we also found a film report taken by Ercole at Przemyśl, showing a staged attack by Cossack cavalry. These scenes were shown in the British newsreel *Pathé's Animated Gazette* and still have the original intertitles:

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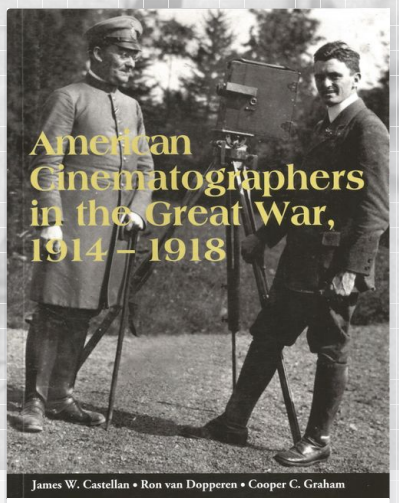

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World War I Combat Camera Edwin F. Weigle Found!

Anatomy of an Authentic World War I Combat Scene (1915)

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► 2018 (50)
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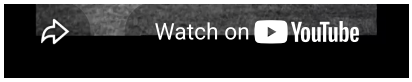

Near Tarnow, while filming an artillery engagement on the Eastern Front, Ercole was hit by debris. A second wound was sustained at Vladova during the retreat from the Austro-German attack later that summer. The Tsar decorated Ercole with the Cross of St. George because of his bravery. He next was commissioned to join the Black Sea fleet and filmed the bombardment of the Turkish navy and the forts along the Bosphorus. While marching with the army of the Caucasus, Ercole also covered the capture of Trebizond in April 1916. When the Armistice was signed in November 1918, Ercole was in Siberia where he covered the landing of the Allied Expeditionary Force with his movie camera.

CAMERAMAN SHOT AT FRONT

Intrepid Movie Photographer Hurt Taking War Pictures

PRESENT AT PRZEMYSL SIEGE

Pittston Gazette, June 2, 1915

After the War

After the war Ercole continued to work for *Pathé News* from Paris. Together with journalist Arthur Ransome he covered the Russian civil war. Ercole scored a spectacular news beat in 1922 when he filmed the burning of Smyrna (Izmir) at the end of the war between Greece and Turkey. This remarkable film report was uploaded last year by British Pathé on the Internet.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 2:28 PM No comments:

TUESDAY, JULY 7, 2015

Ace Newsreeler Ariel Varges Revisited

Among the most prominent, pioneering film cameramen of World War I Ariel Varges (1890-1972) deserves a special notice. As we described in our latest book on the American cinematographers of the Great War, Varges came to Europe in December 1914. By using his close contacts with Sir Thomas Lipton, he got on a ship for the Serbian front and filmed the war in the Balkans. From 1916, he became an official cinematographer for the British army and filmed in Greece and Mesopotamia.

Varges was among William Randolph Hearst's ace newsreel cameramen, both during the Great War and long afterwards. We were fortunate to have written a section on Varges in our book, although a biography on his life and work is long overdue. On the Internet we found additional information on Varges and his family, like the picture shown above, taken in

► September (4)
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George Ercole, "Pathé News" War Photographer
Ace Newsreeler Ariel Varges Revisited
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the 1930s when he was filming wars for the Hearst newsreels in China and Ethiopia.

Ariel Varges, circa 1935
Link to high res image

Greek boys carrying the rifles and equipment of newly landed French soldiers, Thessaloniki, February 1916, © IWM Q 31776. Photograph by Ariel Varges

As a result of the centennial of the First World War, the Goethe Institute has uploaded a unique series of war pictures from the collection of the Imperial War Museum, taken by Varges in 1916 when he recorded the activities of the Entente Expeditionary Force at Thessaloniki, Greece, against the Bulgarian army. These pictures were part of the exhibition *War and Peace in the Balkans.*

Here is a link to the catalogue of this exhibition.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 11:07 PM No comments:

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Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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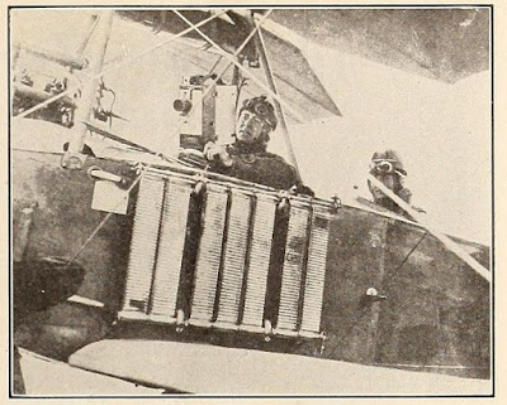
First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

FRIDAY, JUNE 26, 2015

Back to 1915: Reconstructing W.H. Durborough's Historical World War I Film



Durborough filming the Great War, 1915
Link to high res image

In the April 2015 issue of the *Journal of Film Preservation,* Jim Castellan has described his extensive research on Wilbur H. Durborough's remarkable First World War documentary *On the Firing Line with the Germans.* Starting from scratch, nearly all film segments of this historical movie have now been located and identified from various film sources both at the National Archives and the Library of Congress. As a result, this historical feature documentary allows us to revisit the Great War, as seen through the lense of an American war correspondent who was a close witness of the German offensive on the Eastern Front in the summer of 1915.

Reconstruction Project

The Library of Congress has started a reconstruction of the Durborough film, with an intended completion in October 2015, one hundred years after it was first shown in the United States. We will ofcourse keep you posted on this interesting project!

Jim's article for the *Journal of Film Preservation* can be read and downloaded here.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:40 AM No comments:

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24, 2015

U.S. Signal Corps Cinematographers Online

Lieut. R.F. Lyons of 79th Division Photographic Unit in observer's seat of one of 90th Aero Squadron

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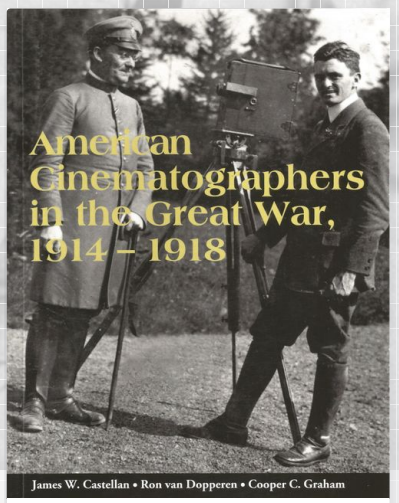

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BLOG ARCHIVE

► 2018 (50)
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planes, 79th Division. Colorized picture, courtesy Harry Kidd
Link to original high res image

From the collection of the National Archives in Washington, DC, an impressive selection of World War I pictures has been uploaded on the Internet. These all show the work done by the Photographic Division of the U.S. Army Signal Corps, which was assigned to record the First World War in 1917-1918. Some of these pictures have been used in our latest book *American Cinematographers in the Great War* to accompany a chapter on these official cameramen from the U.S.A.

Signal Corps Cameramen

Among these pictures are also many interesting photographs showing the Signal Corps cameramen behind their photo and film equipment, such as Lieutenant Lyons of the 79the Division getting ready to make aerial moving pictures above the frontline, reproduced above. The weblog also has the last pictures taken by Lieutenant Estep, recorded by his camera shortly before he was killed in November 1918 on the Western Front.

To view these Signal Corps cameramen in action, here is the link.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:46 PM No comments:

FRIDAY, JUNE 19, 2015

Online Research on Wilbur H. Durborough

At the International Conference of IAMHIST in Bloomington, Jim Castellan presented his extensive research on Wilbur H. Durborough's 1915 WWI feature documentary film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* that is now being restored by the Library of Congress.

Since Jim started his research on Durborough in 2001 new online surrogate sources became available to help reconstruct the story of the making of this fascinating American World War I film.

Jim's presentation can be found online on our YouTube channel.

You can also download the transcript of his presentation here

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:32 PM No comments:

Video Presentation WW1 Cinematographer Albert K. Dawson

On June 19, Cooper Graham and Jim Castellan attended the conference of the International Association for Media and History (IAMHIST) in Bloomington, Indiana, and presented their latest research work on the American film correspondents of the First World War.

Albert K. Dawson, 1915
Link to high res image Dawson in camp before Przemysl

Ron van Dopperen couldn't make it to the United States but went online and prepared a video presentation on Albert K. Dawson (1885-1967) from Vincennes, Indiana, and his remarkable life and work as a camera correspondent during World War I.

As a brief introduction, here is a presentation paper for the IAMHIST Conference.

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U.S. Signal Corps Cinematographers Online
Online Research on Wilbur H. Durborough
Video Presentation WW1 Cinematographer Albert K. D...
Use of the Internet in Tracing the Mysterious Dona...
Review "Shooting the Great War" by Historical Jour...
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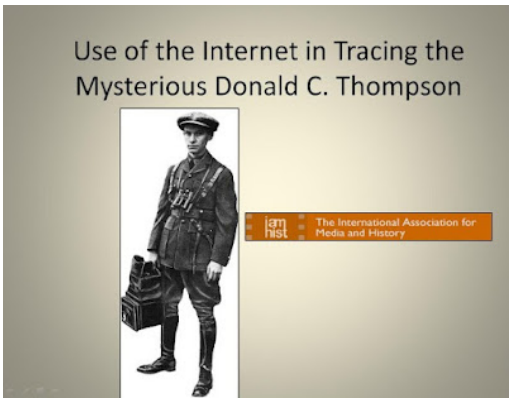
The presentation by Ron on Albert Dawson has also been uploaded on our YouTube channel.

For more information read our book *Shooting the Great War: Albert Dawson and the American Correspondent Film Company, 1914-1918*, available on Amazon.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:31 PM No comments:

Use of the Internet in Tracing the Mysterious Donald C. Thompson



On June 19, at the conference of the International Association for Media and History (IAMHIST), Cooper Graham explained about the way new, online sources were used to research Donald C. Thompson, a World War I cameraman from Kansas, with a mystifying ancestry.

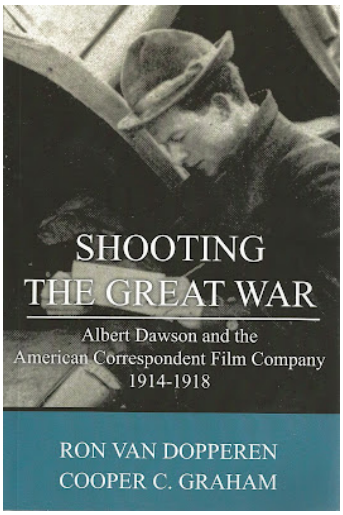
Check out the presentation by Cooper for this conference on our YouTube channel.

Also, here is the transcript of this presentation on Donald C. Thompson.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:31 PM No comments:

FRIDAY, JUNE 5, 2015

Review "Shooting the Great War" by Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television



In the latest issue of the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* Isabelle Freda (Hofstra University) published a review of our book *Shooting the Great War: Albert Dawson and the American Correspondent Film Company, 1914-1918.*

In her review Mrs. Freda qualified the book as an excellent example of the strategy to focus on individual cameramen and their significance for film history.

The review can be downloaded by clicking here on this link.

Mrs. Freda's review was based on one of the earliest editions of our book. The latest edition can be ordered on Amazon.com

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 5:43 PM No comments:

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Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

SATURDAY, MAY 16, 2015

Nicholas McDonald, Cinematographer for the U.S. Signal Corps

Lt. Nicholas McDonald, U.S. Signal Corps. Picture to the right was taken in December 1917 by Capt. Albert K. Dawson

Link to original Signal Corps photograph to the right in high res (12 Mb)

We only mentioned him briefly in our latest book on the American cinematographers of the First World War but he deserves some special attention in our weblog: Lt. Nicholas McDonald. Here in this colorized photograph you see him filming an American artillery barrage northwest of Verdun in October 1918.

Link to high res image

Photojournalist

A photojournalist for the *Chicago Herald & Examiner*, McDonald was a good friend and a close colleague of Wilbur Durborough. He became a cinematographer in 1915 and made official pictures of the Canadian Army. The next year, while working for the *Selig-Tribune* newsreel organization, he covered the attack by General Pershing's forces on Pancho Villa in Mexico. After the American entry into the European war, he was attached to the 1st Division as a Lieutenant of the US Signal Corps photographic unit for that Division. Later, General Pershing promoted him to Captain and assigned him to GHQ of the American Expeditionary Force. At the end of the war, McDonald also

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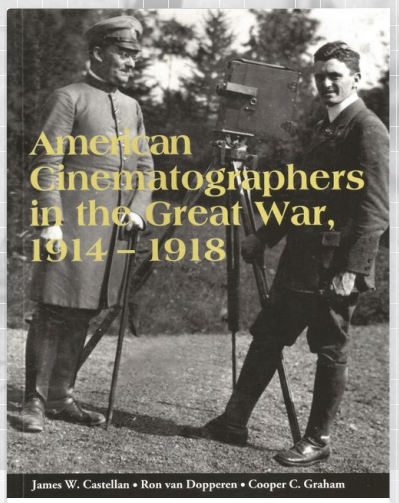

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accompanied the 33rd Division, as this picture indicates, which is taken from *Illinois in the World War* (1921):

A DANGEROUS CORNER IN EXERMONT

Men of the Eighteenth Regiment running for shelter from shell-fire. The First Division had just taken one end of the town when this photograph was taken by Lieutenant Nicholas McDonald (of Chicago), October 7, 1918.

Link to high res image

French family interested in Lt. McDonald's movie camera. Chaumont, November 9, 1918
Link to original high res image (23 Mb)

McDonald filmed at Chateau-Thierry, St. Mihiel and the Argonne offensive and twice received citations for bravery. President Poincaré awarded him with the *Croix de Guerre*. McDonald also covered the Peace Conference at Versailles in 1919. He reportedly did most of the principal photography for the feature film *Pershing's Crusaders* that was released by the Committee on Public Information in 1918. Here in this colorized picture you see him together with another famous war correspondent from Chicago, Floyd Gibbons of the *Chicago Tribune*. In June 1918, at the Battle of Belleau Wood, Gibbons had lost an eye after being hit by German gunfire while attempting to rescue an American soldier.

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Link to original high res image

After World War I, McDonald worked for Walter Niebuhr's American Cinema Corporation, which we also mentioned in our book.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 2:30 PM No comments:

TUESDAY, MAY 12, 2015

Authors' Presentations at IAMHIST Conference in Bloomington

The International Association for Media and History (IAMHIST) has asked us to attend the upcoming conference in Bloomington, Indiana, and present our recent research material on the American film legacy of World War I. The theme of this conference is "Media & History Revisited" and will focus on the influence of digital media on film historical research. The conference is at the Indiana University Memorial Union in Bloomington from June 17-20.

Program

On June 18, between 11-12.30 AM, Cooper Graham will attend a session on key figures in media politics, and present our latest film historical research on the Irish nationalist, Sir Roger Casement. This session will be in the Persimmon Room of the Indiana University Memorial Union.

The next day, on June 19, both Cooper Graham and Jim Castellan will attend a session in the Maple Room between 11-12.30 AM. Jim Castellan will explain about the way he used online surrogate sources to document Wilbur Durborough's World War I film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (1915). Cooper Graham will give a presentation on the online research to trace the mysterious Donald C. Thompson, a war photographer from Kansas. Finally, Ron van Dopperen has prepared a presentation on the reconstruction of Albert Dawson's life and work as a film correspondent during the Great War. Ron can't make it to fly over to the USA but true to the conference's theme he will log in through Skype and attend the conference online.

For more information on the international conference check out the IAMHIST website.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:18 PM No comments:

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Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 2015

Work in Progress: "Sir Roger Casement on Film, 1915-1916"

Almost one hundred years from now, Sir Roger Casement was executed by the British because of his involvement in trying to establish a free, Irish nation. As a follow up on our latest research on the American cinematographers of the Great War, the authors have come across some fascinating information on how the only known extant footage of this historical Irish freedom fighter was filmed when he was in Germany during World War I.

Although not published yet, we are set to go public with this remarkable story next year on the centennial of the Easter Rising in Ireland back in 1916.

We will be back on this latest project!

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 7:27 PM No comments:

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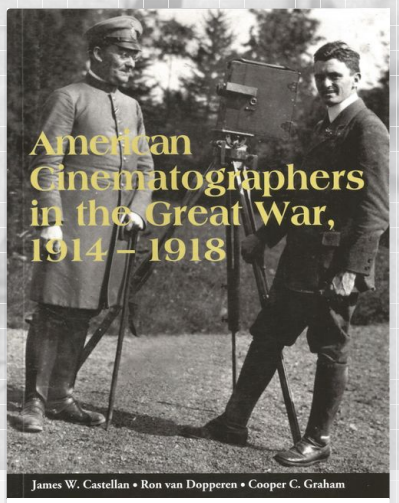

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Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

SATURDAY, MARCH 28, 2015

Durborough Film in WW1 Series "Apocalypse"

Last year, the same team that collaborated on the renowned World War II series *Apocalypse* produced a similar documentary series on the Great War. As with the previous production, the new series has some remarkable colored footage including scenes from Wilbur Durborough's film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (1915).

Interview with the Producers

All together, about three minutes from the original Durborough film were used for *Apocalypse*, and these were edited in episode 2 "Fear". According to an interview with the producers, the footage was taken from the film collection at the Library of Congress. It is a peculiar experience to see the original shots in full color and we leave it up to the viewer whether to prefer the black and white footage or the colored scenes. As an example, here's a scene showing Durborough with a German officer, wrongly introduced by the narrator as General Erich von Falkenhayn.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 3:14 PM No comments:

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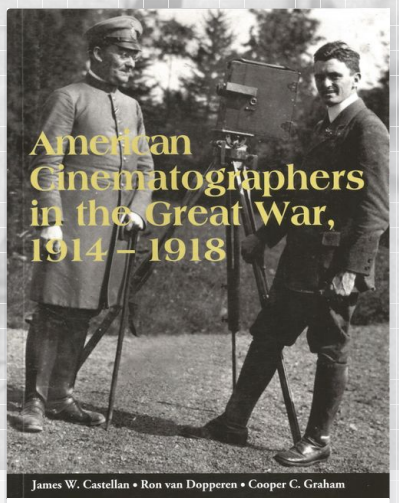

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Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2015

Close Up: Irving Ries and his Brothers

Irving Ries, cinematographer for Wilbur Durborough's *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (1915), features in a recent article by Robert Peters for the New England Journal of Photographic History on the Ries brothers and their place in Hollywood history. The story on how the Ries brothers contributed to the American film industry is in a word fascinating. The brothers had a number of "firsts" in the film industry.

Irving Ries

Awarded with the Iron Cross

Before he went to Germany to cover the First World War Irving Ries filmed in Mexico. He was the only American cinematographer awarded the Iron Cross by the German army. As described in this contemporary trade paper article, Wilbur Durborough had no experience with a movie camera before he went to Germany. So, most of the cinematography for the film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* was done by Ries.

The article also has more on the infamous "counterfeit" Ries who forged his passport and was sent to Britain as a German spy. Around 1956, Irving was nominated for an Academy Award for the special effects in *Forbidden Planet*. He also did the photographic effects for MGM's *The Mysterious Island*, a Technicolor movie from 1929 that was released ten years before the *Wizard of Oz*.

The next eldest brother, Ray, did the special effects in two 1939 blockbuster movies: *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind*. One of the brothers, Paul, invented the Ries tripod which was marketed from 1936 and used by many professional cinematographers. The camera tripod is still being made today. For more information go to www.riestripod.com

The article on the Ries brothers can be read and downloaded here.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 11:22 PM No comments:

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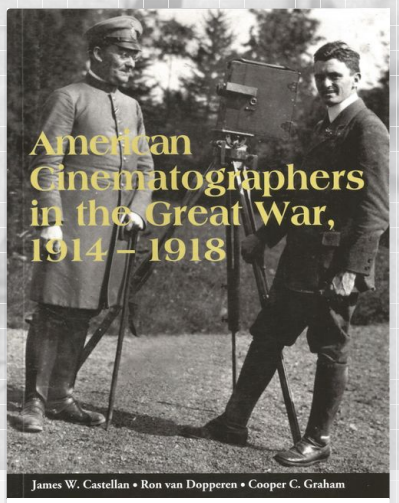

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Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

SUNDAY, JANUARY 18, 2015

Book Trailer Online at YouTube!

Now that our latest book on the American cinematographers of the First World War is available it is time to reveal more of the contents.

So, here is the book trailer that has just been uploaded on YouTube.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 4:02 PM No comments:

THURSDAY, JANUARY 15, 2015

TV Interview with the Authors

While we were in Pordenone for the book presentation of *American Cinematographers in the Great War* we did an interview for the Slovenian television, which recently was broadcasted.

Here's a chance to see and hear us talk about World War I and the impact it had on film history. For those of you who do not understand Slovenian, don't worry. After a brief introduction you will hear all three authors talk in English on our recent book and film research.

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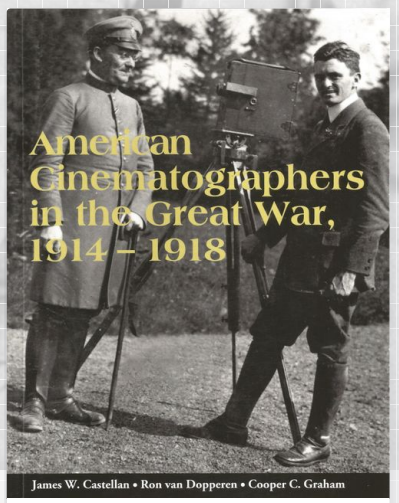

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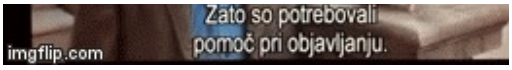

Check out the video for the TV interview!

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 10:00 AM No comments:

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2014

Sneak Preview: Russian Sniper Attack

From January 28, 2015, *American Cinematographers in the Great War* will be available online and in bookstores both in the United States and Europe. For more information go to the publisher's website:

http://www.johnlibbey.com/books_detail.php?area=cine&ID=168

As a preview, here's a scene from Wilbur H. Durborough war film *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (1915). Durborough and his camera operator Ries accompanied the German army in the summer of 1915 during the attack on Russian Poland. Their work at times was dangerous, as they noticed while entering the city of Bloni about 16 miles west of Warsaw. The intertitle of the film reads: "Surprised by Russian snipers at Bloni, in which one man was wounded and we were very nervous for a few minutes while the 'fun' lasted."

Sniper attack - scene from W.H. Durborough's movie
Link to high res image

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 10:35 PM No comments:

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2014

Back to Pordenone

For those of you who were not at Pordenone, Italy, here's a link to Charles Musser's weblog on his pilgrimage to the 33rd edition of the Film Festival, highlighting his comments on some remarkable silent movies that were shown this year such as the *Nibelungen* by Fritz Lang and Fred Niblo's *Ben Hur.*

http://www.charlesmusser.com/?tag=david-francis

Charles also mentioned in his blog the new books published by John Libbey that were presented at Pordenone, including our publication on the American cinematographers of World War I, and as you can see we enjoyed the book launch very much. Great prosecco, John!

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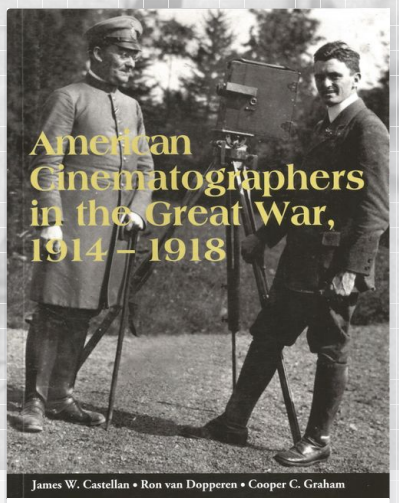

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Sneak Preview: Russian Sniper Attack
Back to Pordenone

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 12:45 AM No comments:

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2014

Thank You!

On Thursday October 9, all three authors were at Pordenone for the presentation of our book *American Cinematographers in the Great War*. Apart from watching some outstanding silent films, we all enjoyed meeting fellow scholars and historians who like us are grateful for the Pordenone film organization to set up this remarkable annual platform where we can exchange the latest news and insights on old films that have been lost and found.

Thank you all for this wonderful experience! It has been a great ride!

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 10:02 PM No comments:

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2014

Book launch at Pordenone, 9 October!

The official presentation of our latest book *American Cinematographers in the Great War* is set! On Thursday evening October 9, 2014, at the Verdi Theatre in Pordenone, Italy, this publication will be presented for the first time.

On behalf of our publisher John Libbey and the Pordenone Film Festival as a sponsor for this book we invite you all to join us and get to know the story on these remarkable American cameramen of World War I. All authors will be there to join you during the book launch!

For more information on the Pordenone Festival of Silent Films, go to http://www.cinetecadelfriuli.org/gcm/

Wilbur Durborough entering Germany, 1915. Colorized picture.
link to original high res image

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Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 3:55 PM No comments:

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2014

"Krieg der Bilder" (Austria, 2014)

Because of the centennial of World War I the Austrian Film Archives has produced *Krieg der Bilder*, an astonishing DVD Box with some rare footage on the Great War. For more information go to www.filmarchiv.at

DVD Series

The three-part DVD series shows how the Habsburg Monarchy used motion pictures as an increasingly important tool for publicity and wartime propaganda. Part I of the DVD series has an unusual scene, taken from a still photograph found at the Austrian State Archives. The caption says - translated into English - "A cinematographer in the destroyed city of Ivangorod, 1915."

As it turns out, the cinematographer is not an Austrian or even a German but the American film correspondent, Albert K. Dawson, from Vincennes, Indiana.

Albert K. Dawson in Ivangorod, August 1915
Link to high res image

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:10 PM No comments:

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2014

Przemyśl Scenes on European Film Gateway

Albert Dawson in camp before Przemyśl, May 1915. Colorized picture.
Photograph from the collection of the National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Extended Version

An extended version of scenes, found before by the authors in the Imperial War Museum, showing segments of Albert K. Dawson's film *The Battle and Fall of Przemyśl* (1915), has been uploaded on the website of the European Film Gateway/Project 1914.

Albert Dawson at flower market in Berlin, March 1915

These films are from the Austrian Film Archives and have Hungarian subtitles. The aftermath of the conquest of Przemysl by the German-Austrian armies is shown, as well as scenes showing Dawson inspecting the ruined forts and the Russian soldiers who were killed in action while defending Przemysl against Austrian machine gunners.

Check out a video from the Imperial War Museum, showing some of these scenes.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 12:08 PM No comments:

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 20, 2014

New Book Available in U.S. through Amazon

Our latest book *American Cinematographers in the Great War* will be distributed in the U.S.A. through several channels, including Amazon.com. The book will be available from January 2015.

For more information and pre-orders go to http://tinyurl.com/pf53zgo

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 10:08 PM No comments:

THURSDAY, JULY 10, 2014

New Book Available at Indiana University Press

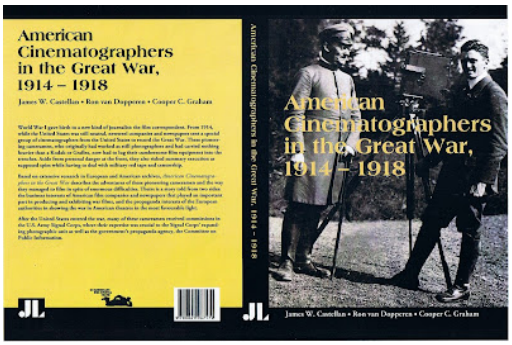
American Cinematographers in the Great War will be available for customers in the U.S. and Asia through Indiana University Press.

For more information on pre-orders and the contents of our new book go to http://tinyurl.com/nmsdbmr

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 11:15 PM No comments:

TUESDAY, JULY 8, 2014

Sneak Preview "American Cinematographers in the Great War"



Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 9:35 PM No comments:

SATURDAY, JUNE 28, 2014

Welcome Aboard, Jim!

Thanks to publisher John Libbey and the Pordenone Silent Film Festival, we have recently completed a new project. Our next book will be called *American Cinematographers in the Great War* and will be a complete overview of the adventures of American cameramen in World War I, set against the rise of the American film industry and the use of film for propaganda purposes by the European authorities.

Co-Author Jim Castellan

As co-author for this new book, we welcome aboard James W. Castellan, an independent scholar researching a biography of journalist Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette associated, including photojournalist and World War I cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsyslvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 9:26 PM No comments:

SUNDAY, JANUARY 19, 2014

Review "Shooting the Great War" (2013)

Here's what one of the readers says about our book on Dawson and the American Correspondent Film Company. Read more on www.amazon.com

Ron van Dopperen and Cooper Graham uncovered one of the least known, yet vastly important efforts in the Great War: Propaganda through film. The American Correspondent Film Company was the brainchild of Heinrich Albert, the German Commercial Attache and Spymaster in the United States during the war. With funds from the Imperial War Department he helped organize a wholly new propaganda war in the United States. Despite its failure to convince an American public not to go to war against Germany in World War I, the use of propaganda as a tactical weapon became one of the mainstays of Nazi Germany some twenty years later.

Van Dopperen and Graham's book is unique and a must read for anyone who wants to understand the use of propaganda in the twentieth century

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:05 PM No comments:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company.* James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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First World War on Film

News & Research Updates on our Publications about the American Cinematographers and Films of World War I

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2013

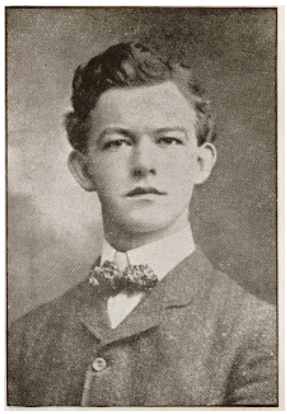
Extended Edition Book on Dawson Now Available

Thanks to new input that we received from the United States and Austria, a new extended edition of the book on Albert K. Dawson and his photographic work during World War I is now available on the Amazon websites in America and Europe.

With special thanks to Norbert Brown (Vincennes) and Sema Colpan (Vienna) for their invaluable information from over here and over there!

In this new edition, the reader will learn more on Dawson's first photographic assignments, his youth in his hometown Vincennes, Indiana, his reports in Vincennes on the Great War, as well as the letters that he wrote to his family on his experiences in wartime Europe.

Over 30 new pages have been added to this edition of *Shooting the Great War: Albert Dawson and the American Correspondent Film Company, 1914-1918.*



Albert K. Dawson, portrait from *Vincennes Capital*, 9 december 1911
Link to newspaper article

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:07 PM No comments:

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2013

New Edition Dawson Book Available Next Month

The book on World War I cinematographer Albert Dawson has been received well - particularly in his hometown Vincennes, Indiana. We got some great comments from local (film) history fans, and as a result the authors also received new information that we will incorporate in a new edition, to be printed next month in December 2013.

Thank you all!

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:09 PM No comments:

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2013

Armistice Day 2013

November 11, 2013 - Armistice Day. The First World War ended 95 years ago. As a special feature, here's a picture copied from the *American Legion Magazine* of June 1942, showing Albert Dawson when he was a Captain in the United States Signal Corps, directing war pictures.

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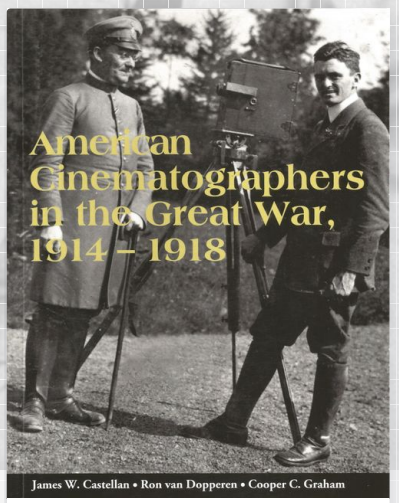

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Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television

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Extended Edition Book on Dawson Now Available

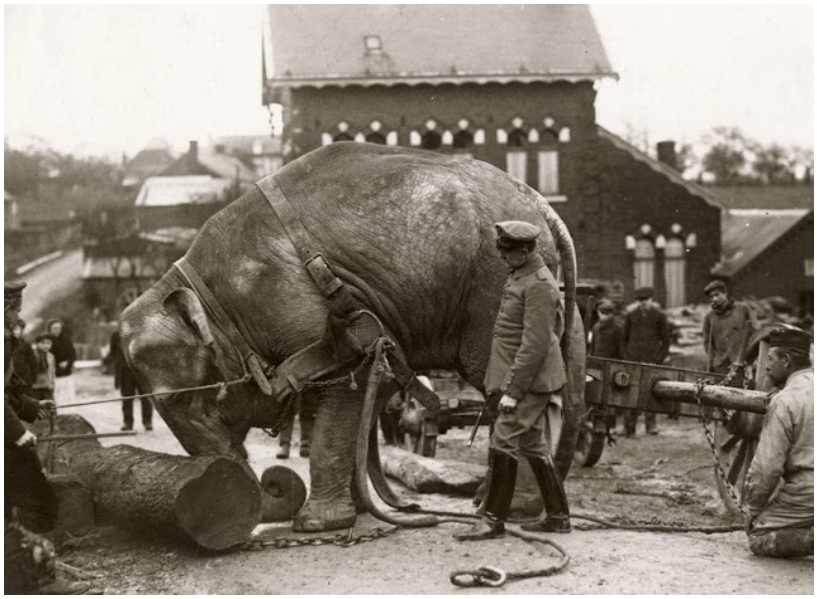
Link to high res image

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 9:00 PM No comments:

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2013

Elephant As War Horse, 1915

An unusual sight: Albert Dawson captured this scene of an elephant being used for for construction work by the German army on the Western Front in early 1915.



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Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 9:04 PM No comments:

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2013

U.S. Signal Corps Photographers Behind the Camera

U.S. Signal Corps cinematographers, photographed by Dawson in 1917, handling the Akeley "pancake" camera. This new model also was used on the European battlefields during World War I.

► November (6)
► October (8)
► July (2)

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Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 10:31 PM No comments:

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2013

Book Review from Vincennes, Indiana

Doug Carroll, from Dawson's hometown Vincennes, Indiana, published the following review on *Shooting the Great War* - thank you, Doug, for your enthusiastic support to our project!

5.0 out of 5 stars **Amazing Book and Story**, November 3, 2013

By **Douglas Carroll** - See all my reviews (REAL NAME) **This review is from: Shooting the Great War: Albert Dawson and the American Correspondent Film Company, 1914-1918 (Paperback)**

I have had the pleasure to read "Shooting the Great War" in both its pre-run and final print editions and now I am grateful to know the story of Albert Dawson. However, that is not the amazing part of this book. Ron van Dopperen and his colleagues have brought to life a story that took place 100 years ago in World War I. The writing is so informative yet an easy read and the photographs are worth the price of the book. Thanks for sharing the amazing story of this talented American.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:48 PM No comments:

Second Book Edition

On November 3, 2013, a second edition of the book on World War I cinematographer Albert K. Dawson has been published. Apart from some minor editorial changes, the authors added some updated new information on the historical background story concerning Dawson's remarkable experiences as a cameraman following the trail of the German, Austrian and Bulgarian armies in 1915-1916.

For the latest edition, go to the Amazon.com website:

http://tinyurl.com/netze8q

The book is also available through Amazon on websites in the UK and Germany.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:44 PM No comments:

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2013

The Catacombs of War

German trench line system around Soissons, Western Front February 1915, pictured by Albert Dawson. Natural caves were converted to dug outs to fortify the German lines.

Link to high res image

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:03 PM No comments:

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2013

Infantry Charge Western Front, 1915

German infantry charge on the Western Front, captured by Albert Dawson in 1915. Both his film footage and a still picture of this scene is reproduced in the book *Shooting The Great War*, now available on Amazon.com

Film scene retrieved in WW1 *History Channel* documentary

Link to high res image

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 8:46 PM No comments:

German Taube in Flight

Nicknamed "the Dove", this German World War I fighter plane was photographed by Dawson in 1915. A lucky shot, he captured this spectacular scene at the exact moment when the plane flew above him. The picture ended up on the cover of the New York Times War Pictorial.

Link to high res image

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 6:28 PM No comments:

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2013

Movie scene: The Spade Brigade

Scene from Dawson's war film "The Battle and Fall of Przemysl": Austrian engineers moving up to the firing line at dawn.

Link to high res image

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 10:46 PM No comments:

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2013

Book on Dawson now available

Starting October 21, 2013, the new book on Albert Dawson and his remarkable experiences as a cinematographer during World War I is available on Amazon, both in the USA and in the United Kingdom and Germany. The book will also be made available for bookstores throughout the United States.

Check out this link for more:

http://tinyurl.com/netze8q

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 10:35 PM No comments:

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2013

Film scene Dawson on Eastern Front

Watch Albert Dawson online at the website of the Imperial War Museum in London.

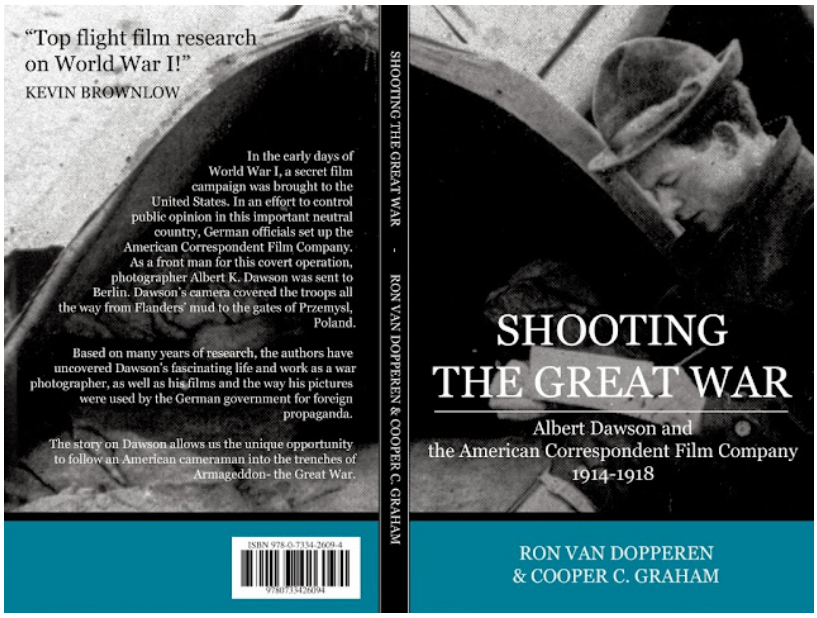
This clip shows him inspecting the ruined forts of Przemysl in June 1915. Rows of Russian soldiers were shot dead by Austrian machine guns around Fort no. 10.

http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060023359

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 10:51 AM No comments:

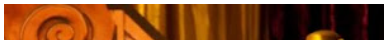
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2013

Cover Shooting the Great War



Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 12:40 PM No comments:

Foreword "Shooting the Great War" by Kevin Brownlow



Kevin Brownlow in 2010 when he received an honorary Oscar Award for his role in film history in film preservation

Our new book *Shooting the Great War* on World War I cinematographer Albert K. Dawson, soon to be available on Amazon.com, will have a foreword by Kevin Brownlow. His magnificent book *The War, the West and the Wilderness* (1979) made us realize the unresearched weath of research opportunities into this subject.

Thank you, Kevin, for your valuable support to this project!

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 11:13 AM No comments:

SUNDAY, JULY 14, 2013

Wikipedia article on Albert K. Dawson

Albert K. Dawson with Kodak camera, 1917
Link to high res image

Learn more on World War I cinematographer Albert K. Dawson at www.wikipedia.com

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_K._Dawson

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 12:11 PM No comments:

New book on cameraman Albert K. Dawson

Almost a hundred years ago, the First World War broke out. Although some military conflicts had been photographed before, the Great War was the first modern war to be recorded on film. To commemorate the upcoming Centennial of the First World War, film historians Ron van Dopperen and Cooper C. Graham have started on a book on Albert K. Dawson, one of the most remarkable cinematographers of the Great War.

Posted by Ron van Dopperen at 12:04 PM No comments:

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ABOUT US

Ron van Dopperen (left) studied history at the University of Utrecht (Holland) where he wrote his Master of Arts Thesis on the American World War I documentary films. Cooper C. Graham (middle) is retired from the Library of Congress where he was a curator in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and (in collaboration) *D.W. Griffith and the Biograph Company*. James W. Castellan (right) is an independant scholar researching a biography of Oswald F. Schuette and articles about some historically significant individuals with whom Schuette asociated including photojournalist and cinematographer Wilbur H. Durborough. Castellan, a graduate of Brown University with an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2001.

Photo: Charles Musser

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